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THE ETHICAL PROJECT KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE SHARE:
ILLUSTRATING, ANALYZING, AND EVALUATING
DIFFERENT WAYS OF LIFE

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THE ETHICAL PROJECT KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE SHARE: ILLUSTRATING, ANALYZING, AND EVALUATING DIFFERENT WAYS OF LIFE

by

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PREFACE

Those who have read both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are often struck by the resemblance not only between many of their ideas, but also between their respective approaches to philosophical thinking. Considered separately, each of these men reveals himself to be an unusually unique and individual thinker. Yet, perhaps somewhat oddly, they also resemble each other in several fundamental ways. Each of these thinkers seems to have something quite valuable to say about contemporary ethics, understood both as an academic field and as an everyday practice, and what they say about ethics seems to converge at several interesting points. As I will discuss shortly, the notion of comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche goes back at least as far as Nietzsche's lifetime, and may have even occurred to Nietzsche himself. The compelling force of this comparison, and the compelling force of their ideas about ethics, was one of the most important inspirations for 20th Century Existentialism, even if it is the case that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were often misunderstood by 20th Century Existentialists, as I will argue later.

However obvious or compelling this comparison may be, for a variety of reasons specifying the value Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can offer contemporary ethics, and how exactly they agree and disagree with each other, is not an easy task. One difficulty is posed by the fact that neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche presents his ideas in a tidy, systematic way, as philosophers might prefer. Discussing their ideas in an informed way requires us to navigate through a complex maze of pseudonyms, personalities, and Socratic masks. It also requires us to have a discerning eye in order to recognize the same ideas presented under different labels in different works. In addition, comparing these thinkers requires discernment in order to recognize the subtle points of intersection at

which Kierkegaard and Nietzsche consider the same issues, each in his own vocabulary.

Another difficulty in trying to understand what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have to offer contemporary ethics is that their work does not fit neatly into the kinds of projects, questions, and discussions that usually concern contemporary ethicists. This is not to deny that there are several valuable points of intersection between these discussions and the ideas of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Indeed, there have been a number of laudable and enlightening efforts to apply insights of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (either separately or in unison) to various contemporary discussions. Yet I think we must also address Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on their own terms and try to understand the projects they themselves are pursuing in their works. What will concern me in this study is not the question of how Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can be applied to various ethical projects currently pursued in contemporary ethics, but rather the question: what is the basic ethical project Kierkegaard and Nietzsche pursue? I am interested in this question because I think it simultaneously addresses the two central concerns of any comparison of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche: what is it that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche most fundamentally have in common, and how exactly is this comparison valuable for contemporary thinking? In what follows, I will show that what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche most fundamentally share is an ethical project, a basic approach to doing ethics, and I will argue that it is this project itself that is, or can be, their most valuable contribution to contemporary ethics.[1]

[1] This is not to say that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche focus all their efforts on only one project. I think they both pursue a number of different projects, including projects in the fields of aesthetics and religious studies. But I also think that many of their central ideas and discussions can be best understood as directed toward a single overarching concern, and that this concern is an *ethical* concern in the broadest sense of the word 'ethical.' To those who would object that neither Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are philosophers, and that they therefore cannot be understood as pursuing any such philosophical project, (a position found among both supporters and detractors of these thinkers) I can only reply that what follows in this study proves otherwise. As I will suggest in the chapters to follow, and as I think these thinkers would themselves agree, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both pursue philosophy in the way Socrates might have understood this term. If the kind of work Kierkegaard and Nietzsche pursue is not recognizable according to some current understandings of philosophy, I contend that this is the fault of these current understandings of philosophy.

The ethical project in which I find both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche engaged is the project of illustrating, analyzing, and evaluating different ways of life considered as a whole. It is in the pursuit of this project that Kierkegaard illustrates what he calls the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious 'spheres of existence.' It is in the pursuit of this same project that Nietzsche illustrates what he sometimes calls 'master morality' and 'slave morality' and sometimes calls the 'noble mode of valuation' and the 'ascetic mode of valuation.' It is also in the pursuit of this project that Nietzsche illustrates his portrait of a new 'higher type'. Kierkegaard's thinking about 'despair' and Nietzsche's thinking about 'nihilism' are likewise part of this project. Specifically, these notions allow us to analyze and evaluate a way of life according to the internal collapse by which this way of life fails according its own evaluative standards. In addition, Kierkegaard's thinking about a 'leap of faith' or 'metamorphosis' and Nietzsche's thinking about a 'self-overcoming' and new 'revaluation of values' explain how an agent can make a transition between ways of life.

I believe that we will remain unable to fully understand any these central concepts in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche until we understand the ethical project in which these concepts are employed. Unlike most normative ethical thinkers, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not approach ethics by asking what actions are right or wrong or what principles can be found to distinguish right from wrong actions. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche take a much broader approach to ethics, asking instead about the fundamental existential stance that one takes towards oneself, towards others, and towards existence as a whole. They are interested in how an agent's fundamental stance manifests itself in actuality, in the lived experience of the agent adopting this stance. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the agent's particular beliefs, actions, and judgments all flow from this fundamental stance; what I mean by a 'way of life' is the manifestation of this fundamental existential stance in the agent's thought, experience and action. Adopting this broader approach to ethics, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche develop an ethical ideal that can only be understood as a whole way of life, and

they both diagnose ethical failure as a failure of a whole way of life. Perhaps most importantly, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche believe that the kinds of ethical transformations and changes that are ethically most needful must be changes of one's way of life as a whole. As I will argue in the concluding chapter, I believe that adding the ethical project we find in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to the curriculum of projects we currently pursue in contemporary ethics will allow us to gain a deeper, more comprehensive, and more individual approach to ethics manifests itself in the actuality of our lives.

This is, of course, not the only way of reading Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. But I will provide a convincing case for the validity of this reading by looking closely at some of the central texts of both of these thinkers. Of Kierkegaard's works, I will focus on *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *The Sickness Unto Death*. I will also draw extensively from Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and his various discourses. Of Nietzsche's works, I will focus on *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* while drawing extensively from *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Anti-Christ*, and *Ecce Homo*.

My claim is not that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are unique in pursuing this ethical project. To the contrary, I believe that something like this project was one of the central concerns of ancient Greek ethics. For example, a very similar project can be found in Plato's *Republic,* especially in Books VIII and IX where Plato examines different kinds of constitutions and the individuals who embody them. This ethical project can be found Plato's explanations of the inner workings of the souls of these individuals, and the relationship between their internal 'constitution' and they way they relate to those around them. Plato's psychological portrait of the tyrant is particularly interesting in this respect, and it may have served as an inspiration for some of the portraits developed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Something like this ethical project is also one of the central organizing concerns of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Kierkegaard's triad of different ways of life bears a remarkable resemblance, and perhaps also a debt, to Aristotle's "three most prominent ways of life": the life of pleasure, the

political-military life of social virtue, and the contemplative life of intellectual virtue (1095b17). Aristotle's discussion of the relative worth of these ways of life, and how a way of life relates to the various virtues he discusses, is one of the most evident precursors to the project I find in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. I also think we find something like the notion of a "fundamental existential stance" in Stoic thinking, specifically in the stance toward oneself and the world adopted by the Stoic sage. As I will argue in the concluding chapter, despite the centrality of this ethical project in ancient ethics, I think this project is generally lacking in contemporary ethical debate, especially in the two dominant contenders in this debate: deontology and utilitarianism.

As I have already suggested, the idea of comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is also not unique. There have been a considerable number of past comparisons of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in the secondary literature dealing with these figures. The 20th Century Existentialist Karl Jaspers is generally credited with being the first to publish a comparison of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but in fact there were at least three such studies preceding Jasper's account, one of which was published within Nietzsche's lifetime (although after he had become comatose.)[2] In Chapter 5, I will review a dozen of the most recent or influential studies of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but it behooves me to say something about them here in order to justify undertaking yet another study of this topic. Perhaps most importantly, many of these studies were written without the benefit of the kind exacting, quality scholarship with which these thinkers are now (sometimes) studied. In many of these comparisons, scholars more familiar with one of these thinkers than the other have tended to misunderstand and caricature the thinker with whom they are less familiar. Moreover, scholars already championing one of these figures have often

[2] Karl Jaspers, "Kierkegaard und Nietzsche: Leiden oder Lust als letztes" in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*. (Berlin: Jul Springer, 1919) was preceded by: K. E. Knodt, "Kierkegaard und Nietzsche" in *Monatsblätter für Deutsche Litteratur* (Leipzig, 1897), Angelo Rappoport, "Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard," in *New Age*, 3 (1908), Gottlieb Sodeur, *Kierkegaard und Nietzsche. Versuch einer vergleichender Würdigung*, (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck, 1914).

approached this comparison as a way of issuing a decisive rebuttal of the other, or as a way of dismissing any valuable association between the two. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are both revered for the ferocity of their attacks on other thinkers, and it is perhaps understandable that scholars championing one of these thinkers want to turn this ferocity against the other thinker. Unfortunately, this 'prize fight' approach tends to have the effect of obscuring the most fundamental points of agreement between the two; as I hope to show, unless we understand Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as asking the same kinds of questions, the contrast in their answers can never be fully understood. Moreover, since within these studies the confrontation between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is choreographed by a scholar already championing one thinker over the other, the results are predictably biased.

In what follows, I will attempt an open-minded and equally informed comparison of these two thinkers. I show that it is precisely because they are asking the same fundamental question that they can be in such direct disagreement with each other. My aim is not to find a decisive reply to one thinker in the thought of the other, but to explore the dialogue that opens up when we understand their writings in relation to the shared ethical project discussed above.

In the first two chapters, I will clarify what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche mean by a 'way of life' and establish what way of life each thinks to be best. In the next two chapters, I will explore their respective conceptions of ethical failure as an internal collapse of a way of life: Chapter 3 will address Kierkegaard's notion of despair (*Fortvilve*) and Chapter 4 will address Nietzsche's notion of nihilism (*Nihilismus*). In these chapters, I will also address the possibility of a transition between ways of life, the process of self-transformation that Kierkegaard sometimes calls a 'leap' (*Spring*) or a 'metamorphosis' (*Metamorphose*) and that Nietzsche calls a redemptive 'self-overcoming' (*Selbstaufhebung* or *Selbstüberwindung*) and a 'revaluation of values' (*Umwertung der Werte*). In Chapter 5, I will address other studies of Kierkegaard and

Nietzsche, and I will explain how each thinker's conception of internal collapse can serve as a powerful, if not necessarily fatal, challenge to the ideal way of life proposed by the other thinker. In Chapter 6, I will consider the fundamental points of agreement between their respective conceptions of the ideal best way of life, specifically their respective notions of individuality, spirituality, and life-affirmation. Finally, in Chapter 7 I will conclude by summarizing the ethical project I find in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and I will present my case for why pursuing this project alongside the ethical projects we currently pursue can be valuable for contemporary ethical thinking.

Although my study will not put any weight on establishing a *historical* connection between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, I will end this introductory section by briefly discussing this topic. It is worth addressing both because it is generally misunderstood and because it provides an interesting way of introducing some of the key points of comparison between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that will arise in later chapters. To my knowledge, no other full-length study of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche has addressed recent and dramatic discoveries about the historical connections between these thinkers.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were as close to being exactly one generation apart as any two people could be: Kierkegaard was born in the same year as Nietzsche's father, 1813. Kierkegaard died when Nietzsche was only a child, so there is obviously no chance of Kierkegaard having been familiar with Nietzsche's thinking. But how familiar Nietzsche might have been with Kierkegaard's thinking is an intriguing question. We know that Nietzsche's friend, the great Danish literary critic Georg Brandes (who was the first person to lecture on Nietzsche's work) recommended that Nietzsche read Kierkegaard. In a letter to Nietzsche from January 1888, Brandes writes that Kierkegaard's work would interest Nietzsche and that Kierkegaard is, in Brandes' opinion, "still one of the deepest psychologists."[3] In reply, Nietzsche wrote that he intended to

[3] Letter from Brandes to Nietzsche, January 11, 1888.

study the "psychological problem" of Kierkegaard, and to renew his familiarity with Brandes' earlier work, on his next trip to Germany.[4] Most scholars who have written about Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have concluded that because this trip never happened, Nietzsche must have never gotten the chance to learn anything about Kierkegaard or his ideas. Almost certainly, Nietzsche never owned or read any of Kierkegaard's books. However, Thomas Brobjer has recently published convincing evidence that Nietzsche is likely to have been much more familiar with Kierkegaard's ideas than has previously been thought. Brobjer demonstrates that through secondary sources Nietzsche is likely to have read as much as fifty pages about Kierkegaard, including five pages of quotations from Kierkegaard's works.[5]

Among the sources from which Nietzsche may have gained familiarity with Kierkegaard, three stand out as particularly important. Brandes' own *Hovedströmninger i det nittende Aarhundredes Litteratur* (*Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*) contains several discussions of Kierkegaard and a number of long quotes from Kierkegaard's works. We know that Nietzsche had read at least parts of this work by 1878, and had probably reread it in 1887-1888 (Brobjer, 253). (This may be the earlier work of Brandes that Nietzsche refers to in the letter quoted above, and if so, it is clear that Nietzsche remembered reading about Kierkegaard in this work.) We also know that Nietzsche had extremely high praise for this work, which suggests that he had more than a passing familiarity with it. In a letter dated August 20th, 1888, Nietzsche recommends this work to Carl Fuchs, saying that it "is still today the best cultural book [*Kulturbuch*] in German on this large subject" (Brobjer, 273).

Several things Brandes says about Kierkegaard in these volumes would have been of great interest to Nietzsche. For example, Brandes provides an extended discussion of Kierkegaard's authorial methods, particularly his use of

[4] Letter from Nietzsche to Brandes, February 19, 1888.
[5] Thomas Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2002) 251-63.

masks and pseudonyms. Brandes includes a full-page quotation from Kierkegaard's discussion of his authorship in the *Postscript*, and explains that "[t]o keep the general public at a distance, to avoid laying bare his heart, and most important of all, to avoid the tiresome responsibility entailed by speaking in his own name, Kierkegaard places as many authors between himself and the public as possible" (Brandes, Vol. II, 158). Brobjer points out that Nietzsche, who considered publishing *Human, All Too Human* under a pseudonym, and who certainly employed his own tricks to keep the public at a distance, might have found this discussion interesting (Brobjer, 255).

To give an even more intriguing example, in a discussion of "personal lawlessness" masquerading as imagination in Romantic literature, Brandes says that "Kierkegaard's Johannes the Seducer, the most perfect and the last example of the type in Danish literature, always keeps within certain bounds; he evades ethical questions, looking upon morality as a tiresome, troublesome power, and never attacking it directly" (Brandes, Vol II, 63).[6] Nietzsche would obviously have been interested in this discussion of morality as something that is "troublesome" and in need of indirect attack, and he was also interested in the question of the inner constraints or 'lawlessness' among creative types.

In a later chapter, Brandes discusses Kierkegaard in relation to the issue of sickness and Christianity, another central concern for Nietzsche: "Pascal, and our own Kierkegaard, contented themselves with defining sickness as the Christian's natural condition" (Brandes, Vol. II, 188-9). As we will discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche use the metaphor of sickness to describe what they take to be a contemporary crisis of values, a crisis in which contemporary Christianity plays a primary role. Related to this concern, Brandes quotes Kierkegaard's aesthete A as recommending that one refrain from adopting any "calling or profession" since "[b]y so doing a man becomes simply one of the mob, a tiny bolt in the great machinery of the state; he ceases to be master. . ."

[6] Georg Brandes, *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*, (London: William Heinemann, 1901).

(Brandes, Vol. II, 75). Likewise, Brandes quotes Kierkegaard's condemnation of "a very narrow-minded morality" that has "indefatigably striven to make love as tame, well broken-in, heavy, sluggish, useful, and obedient, as any other domestic animal – in short, as unerotic as possible" (Brandes, Vol. II, 76). As we will see in the coming chapters, one of the most important concerns that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche share is that their fellow Europeans are becoming progressively more conformist and mediocre, a problem they both find traditional Western morality complicit in perpetuating.

This portrayal of Kierkegaard as a crusader for individualism and against mediocrity and social conformity is further developed in the work of Danish theologian and bishop H.L. Martensen, especially in his widely read and translated *Christian Ethics*. In preparing for his attack on Christian ethics in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche asked his mother to send him a number of works on this subject, including Martensen's. Although it is unclear what volumes of this work Nietzsche might have owned, we know that he read at least the first volume in the spring and summer of 1880 (Brobjer, 256). This volume contains a detailed analysis of Kierkegaard's thought covering twenty-seven consecutive pages and containing several important quotations from Kierkegaard's texts (Brobjer, 256).

Brobjer is right to say that Nietzsche would have found in Martensen "both motivation and ammunition" for his attack on Christian ethics, but he does not sufficiently emphasize that in attacking Martensen, Nietzsche may have consciously allied himself with Kierkegaard. I think Brobjer understates the case when he says merely that Kierkegaard "read and criticized" Martensen (Brobjer, 255). As a Professor of Hegelian philosophy (Kierkegaard's own, who also served on Kierkegaard's dissertation defense committee) and, later, the head of the state-run Danish Church, Martensen bore the brunt of Kierkegaard's attacks during Kierkegaard's final and most vicious polemical period. I think it is fair to say that of all the figures with whom Kierkegaard feuded publicly, H. L. Martensen was his greatest arch-enemy. Although Martensen's treatment of

Kierkegaard in *Christian Ethics* is quite civil, it illustrates the central point of contention between them, namely that Kierkegaard was an advocate of a strong form of individualism, especially with respect to spiritual matters, whereas Martensen defended a much more communal (and rationalist) form of religion. Martensen says of Kierkegaard that he "made it the aim of his life to promote and carry through the category 'the individual'" and to pursue "the task of 'resisting an immoral confusion, which will demoralize the individual by means of universal *humanity*'" (Martensen, 219, 228).[7] Since Nietzsche's primary criticism of Christianity is that it is a 'herd' phenomenon with disastrous effects for individuality, it seems likely that Nietzsche would have found much to sympathize with in these descriptions of Kierkegaard. Nietzsche would have also agreed with Kierkegaard's insistence, quoted by Martensen, that "Christianity is a vast deception" since those who call themselves Christians "have their lives in entirely different categories" than the category of Christianity as it was understood and established by Jesus (Martensen, 225).[8]

Another interesting point of comparison that Brobjer neglects to discuss involves Kierkegaard's concept of "leveling." "Leveling" (*Nivelleringen*) is the name Kierkegaard gives to the process of collapse in which reverence for qualitative distinctions becomes so eroded that we are left with bland mediocrity in place of any conception of excellence. Martensen mentions Kierkegaard's notion of leveling more than once and explains Kierkegaard's view that "this age is the age of *breaking up*, the age of 'leveling,' in which all authority is undermined by insidious reflection, and becomes daily more so" (Martensen, 232). Nietzsche himself uses the term "leveling" (*Ausgleichung*)[9] to describe the

[7] Hans Lassen Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, transl. C. Spence, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873).
[8] Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are in agreement in thinking that contemporary Christianity is an almost unrecognizable perversion of the original Christian message. Kierkegaard's own 'attack on Christendom' is no less fierce than Nietzsche's, even if the scope of Nietzsche's attack is broader than Kierkegaard's. For example, Kierkegaard does not share Nietzsche's unqualified contempt for Paul, whom Nietzsche blames for first twisting the Christian message into its opposite.
[9] Nietzsche uses *Ausgleichung* rather than *Nivellierung*, the closest German equivalent of the Danish *Nivelleringen*. I have not yet been able to examine a German translation of Martensen's text to see what term Nietzsche might have read there.

same process by which we become mediocre and passionless (see, for example, BGE:242, GM I:12, GM I:16). Of course this does not in itself prove that Kierkegaard was the source of Nietzsche's use of this term, since it is possible that they both developed this idea independently or inherited this term from other thinkers, but we cannot rule out the possibility of a direct influence here. Either way, it is interesting to note that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are both worried about a modern progression toward mediocrity and conformity, and that they use nearly equivalent terms to describe this progression.

Martensen's account also contains other descriptions of Kierkegaard's ideas with which Nietzsche would have had sympathy. For example, Martensen discusses Kierkegaard's insistence on the close relationship between truth, individuality, and actual lived existence. Martensen quotes Kierkegaard's famous line that "subjectivity is the truth," which Nietzsche might have also read in Brandes (Brandes, Vol. II, 72). Martensen reveals what we might call the "existentialist" element in Kierkegaard's thinking in explaining that Kierkegaard "declares war on all speculation," that "existence and the actual constitute the passion of Kierkegaard," and that the "category of the 'individual' interests [Kierkegaard] only in the sense of the individual existing man. He has arrived at the perception that 'subjectivity is the truth'" (Martensen, 223,222). Although I will say very little about Nietzsche's theories of truth in this study, it is worth mentioning that Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, expressed frustration at what he saw as the tendency for philosophers to flee from actuality into abstract thought. Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche concerned himself with thinking about actual lived experience rather than abstract theoretical problems.

In keeping with this existentialist orientation, Nietzsche is in agreement with Kierkegaard that the kinds of truths that really matter to people's lives can only be learned individually. He would have agreed with Kierkegaard that "'it is impossible to edify or to be edified *en masse*'" (Martensen, 229). Nietzsche shares Kierkegaard's contempt for 'the public', especially with respect to the kinds of 'truths' by which one lives. Martensen quotes another famous passage

from Kierkegaard on truth and individuality that Nietzsche would probably have found quite in keeping with his own views:

> 'There is one view of life,' says he, 'which entertains the idea, that where the multitude is, there also is truth, – that there dwells in truth an inherent necessity to have the multitude on its side; there is another view of life which holds, that wherever the multitude is, there is untruth'. (Martensen, 228)

Nietzsche might also have been interested in Kierkegaard's characterization of the task of bringing about an individual understanding of life, and individuality itself, as an essentially Socratic task. Martensen quotes Kierkegaard's line from *The Sickness Unto Death* to the effect that what the modern world really needs is another Socrates (Martensen, 222). In agreement with Andrea Orsucci[10], Brobjer suggests that several passages from Nietzsche's *Daybreak* may have been influenced by his reading of Martensen and that some of these may include indirect references to Kierkegaard (Brobjer, 256). Most compelling, perhaps, is Brobjer's suggestion that *Daybreak* §9 makes reference to Kierkegaard as one of (rare) moral thinkers who, in the manner of Socrates, focuses on ethics as it manifests itself in the lives of individuals (Brobjer, 258).

Whether or not Nietzsche ever made reference to Kierkegaard, it seems likely that he gained a sympathetic understanding of Kierkegaard from Martensen's work. Yet from both Martensen and Brandes Nietzsche would have learned that Kierkegaard was a Christian, and this placed Kierkegaard in a rare (if not impossible) category in Nietzsche's way of thinking: an *individualist* Christian. Understood as such, Kierkegaard avoids much of the venom of Nietzsche's attack on Christianity, as we will see in Chapter 5. It may be that Nietzsche's interest in writing on "the psychological problem of Kierkegaard" stemmed from the difficulty of fitting Kierkegaard into his usual conceptions of Christianity.

[10] Andrea Orsucci, *Okzident-Orient*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 174-177.

The last source I will discuss offers the most convincing evidence that Nietzsche knew and took an interest in at least one key concept in Kierkegaard's thinking. In the autumn of 1887 Nietzsche read and heavily annotated Harald Höffding's *Psychologie im Umrissen auf Grundlage der Erfahrung* (Brobjer, 259). In this work, the Danish philosopher and psychologist Höffding discusses and quotes Kierkegaard on only two pages, but we have good reason to believe that Nietzsche took an interest in what he read there. Nietzsche underlined the central sentence in Höffding's description of Kierkegaard's notion of "repetition" and wrote "NB" (*nota bene*) in the margin: "*Deshalb ist für S. Kierkegaard die Möglichkeit der Wiederholung das ethische Grundproblem*" ("Therefore the possibility of repetition is for S. Kierkegaard the fundamental problem of ethics") (Brobjer, 259). Nietzsche also drew a vertical line in the margin of the footnote to this passage which quotes from Kierkegaard's work entitled *Repetition*:

> The one who only hopes, he is cowardly, the one who only wants to remember, he is voluptuous, the one who wants a repetition, he is a man…When one has traveled through existence, then it will be clear if one has the courage to understand that life is a repetition, and if one is willing to find joy in this. (Brobjer's translation, Brobjer, 260).

Here we find intriguing evidence that Nietzsche was aware of one of the more obvious points of comparison between his thinking and the thinking of Kierkegaard, namely the comparison between Kierkegaard's notion of "repetition" and Nietzsche's own notion of "eternal recurrence."[11] Nietzsche would have been especially interested in the notion of finding "joy" in the understanding that one's life is a matter of repetition since this nicely parallels his ideal of being able to joyfully say 'yes' to the prospect of eternal recurrence.

[11] Of course, we should be wary of Höffding's claim that the notion of "repetition" is for Kierkegaard "the fundamental problem of ethics." For the most part, and especially in the book *Repetition*, the concept of repetition is central to the aesthetic life of enjoyment. Yet Kierkegaard also develops a notion of repetition in relation to the ethical life and in relation to the life of faith. For example, Kierkegaard finds a religious pattern of repetition in Abraham's regaining of Isaac and in Job's regaining of his life after his trial has ended. For a full discussion of this topic, see Edward Mooney, "Repetition: Getting the world back," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Hannay & Marino, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 292-307.

Although neither Kierkegaard's notion of 'repetition' nor Nietzsche's notion of 'eternal recurrence' will figure centrally in the chapters to follow, it is worth noting here that for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche the affirmation of one's life in the world is a central requirement for the best way of life.

Having reviewed this evidence for a possible historical connection between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, I will leave this topic aside. In what follows, I will also leave aside questions about the historical sources behind Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ideas and questions about the influences they may have had on later thinkers. My primary concern is to reveal what I take to be a valuable philosophical connection between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche by showing how they each develop and respond to the same basic ethical project. Although the various particular points of agreement between them just discussed are certainly intriguing, I believe that we can only fully appreciate the significance of these particular similarities when we have understood the broader convergence in their basic philosophical concerns.

ABBREVIATIONS OF TITLES

KIERKEGAARD:

[EO I]	*Either/Or Vol.I* (Hong & Hong)
[EO II]	*Either/Or Vol. II* (Hong & Hong)
[FT]	*Fear and Trembling* (Hannay)
[GD]	*Godly Discourses* (Lowrie)
[PC]	*Practice in Christianity* (Hong & Hong)
[PS]	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Hong & Hong)
[SUD]	*The Sickness Unto Death* (Hannay)
[SLW]	*Stages on Life's Way* (Hong & Hong)
[WL]	*Works of Love* (Hong & Hong)
[WA]	*Without Authority* (Hong & Hong)

NIETZSCHE:

[A]	*The Antichrist* [Hollingdale]
[BGE]	*Beyond Good & Evil* [Hollingdale]
[D]	*Daybreak* [Hollingdale]
[EH]	*Ecce Homo* [Kaufmann]
[GS]	*The Gay Science* [Kaufmann]
[GM]	*On the Genealogy of Morals* [Kaufmann]
[HH]	*Human, All Too Human* [Hollingdale]
[TI]	*Twilight of the Idols* [Hollingdale]
[Z]	*Thus Spake Zarathustra* [Hollingdale]

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I believe that what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche most fundamentally share is an ethical project, a basic approach to doing ethics. I argue that it is this project itself that can be their most valuable contribution to contemporary ethics. Unlike most normative ethical thinkers, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not approach ethics by asking what actions are right or wrong or what principles can be found to distinguish right from wrong actions. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche take a much broader approach to ethics, asking instead about the fundamental existential stance that one takes towards oneself, towards others, and towards existence as a whole. The ethical project in which I find both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche engaged is the task of illustrating, analyzing, and evaluating different ways of life where these ways of life are defined by the agent's fundamental existential stance. It is in the pursuit of this project that Kierkegaard illustrates what he calls the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious 'spheres of existence.' It

is in the pursuit of this same project that Nietzsche illustrates what he sometimes calls 'master morality' and 'slave morality' and sometimes calls the 'noble mode of valuation' and the 'ascetic mode of valuation.' It is also in the pursuit of this project that Nietzsche illustrates his portrait of a new 'higher type'. Kierkegaard's thinking about 'despair' and Nietzsche's thinking about 'nihilism' are likewise part of this project. Specifically, these notions allow us to analyze and evaluate a way of life according to the internal collapse by which this way of life fails according its own evaluative standards. In addition, Kierkegaard's thinking about a 'leap of faith' or 'metamorphosis' and Nietzsche's thinking about a 'self-overcoming' and new 'revaluation of values' explain how an agent can make a transition between ways of life. Despite the centrality of something like this ethical project in ancient Greek ethics, I think this broader approach is generally lacking in contemporary ethical debate. I show how pursuing this project alongside the ethical projects we currently pursue can be valuable for contemporary ethical thinking.

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CHAPTER 1 KIERKEGAARD'S WAYS OF LIFE

One purpose of these first two chapters is to illustrate what I mean by a 'way of life' in both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche by looking at the different ways of life each thinker discusses. Although I have tried to present them as thinking of ways of life along similar lines (e.g. what one values and how this manifests itself in how one relates to oneself, others and the world through thought and action), I have also tried to present the ideas of each thinker in his own terms. My goal is not to force a comparison by, say, reading Kierkegaard through the lens of Nietzsche's thought, but to allow a comparison to come to the fore by carefully examining the texts of each author. Another purpose of these chapters is to carefully address what the best way of life entails for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, as this is one of the most challenging questions for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche scholars. Later chapters will analyze the points of agreement and disagreement between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche regarding these ways of life, especially the way of life each considers as best.

Kierkegaard is well known for expounding a trilogy of different ways of life (the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious lives), yet there are various sub-groups within these categories that it will be important to distinguish.

§1 THE AESTHETIC WAY OF LIFE

Of the different ways of life, the aesthetic is the broadest in scope, incorporating an abundant range of variations. It is defined most simply as the life lived for enjoyment. Yet there are different objects and methods of enjoyment, and within the aesthetic way of life there are numerous subspecies which are differentiated accordingly. In the second volume of *Either/Or*, the representative of the ethical life, Judge Wilhelm, gives a typology of seven different versions of the aesthetic life differentiated according to the object of one's enjoyment: (1) beauty or health, (2) money, honors or status, (3) talent, (4) the immediate fulfillment of desire, (5) reflective enjoyment, (6) cynical renunciation, and (7) poetic expression of the "nothingness" and despair of life. In the first volume of *Either/Or* we get a close look at only a couple of versions of the aesthetic life. The pseudonymous representative of this life, known simply as

A, proposes more than one typology for differentiating a type of life according to its primary object and method of enjoyment.[12] Perhaps most helpfully, he suggests a fundamental distinction between those who seek enjoyment "immediately," in actual experience, and those who seek enjoyment "reflectively," in reflection on these experiences. Enjoyment may be pursued in the immediate experience of actual life (e.g., in the sensuous pleasure of a good meal) or in the reflective "recollection" of such experiences (e.g. in an aesthetic critique of the meal, or in a poetic reproduction of it). An example of such a reflective recollection is found in *Stages On Life's Way*: 'In Vino Veritas,' subtitled "A Recollection," is the account of a lavish banquet related by William Afham, the pseudonymous representative of the aesthetic life in *Stages.*[13]

By his own admission, A is a reflective aesthete, specifically one who lives a "poet existence" (*EO I:*36). Yet A is the pseudonymous spokesman for the aesthetic life as a whole, and his collected writings contain a dialectical commentary on different attempts to live the life of enjoyment either immediately or reflectively. In 'The Immediate Erotic Stages', A establishes the figure of Don Juan as the ideal representative of the life of immediate enjoyment. In the 'The Rotation of Crops,' 'The Unhappiest One' and 'Diapsalmata', A examines the problems which plague the pursuit of immediate pleasure. He also proposes an alternate path, that of the reflective aesthete, and reveals himself as a representative of this way of life.[14] In what follows, we will examine the life of

[12] For example, in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages' A gives a typology of three different "stages" of immediate enjoyment, and in 'Silhouettes' he gives a typology of different reflective methods of coping with disappointment. Note that A is primarily concerned with the question of which way of life is best, given the boredom and disappointment of existence. But framing the question in this way leads him to develop a typology of different ways of living only within the 'sphere' of the aesthetic life.

[13] William Afham supplies a preface to his "recollection" in which he develops a theoretical explanation of the nature and value of such recollections. Although Afham's understanding of recollection is essentially the same as A's, Afham lays down certain restrictions which A does not. For example, Afham believes that recollections should be "accurate" and "happy" (*SLW*: 9). For our purposes, we will focus on *Either/Or*'s A as the main representative of the aesthetic life, noting Afham's disagreements with A only as these become relevant in later discussions.

[14] The figure of Johannes the Seducer in 'The Seducer's Diary' stands as an unnerving "shadow" or poetic reproduction of A's life. Victor Eremita suspects that 'Johannes the Seducer' is A's own poetic creation, citing as his evidence that otherwise A would show delight in having found a concrete manifestation of his theoretical category 'the reflective seducer,' the reflective "counterpart" to Don Juan (*EO I:*9). To what extent A actually lives like Johannes the Seducer is left unclear.

immediate enjoyment, including A's critique of this life, and then examine the life of reflective enjoyment that A proposes as an alternative.

For A, the figure of Don Juan represents a life successfully immersed in the enjoyment of immediate pleasure. What Don Juan desires most is sensual love, and this desire is repeatedly satisfied through his seduction of one woman after another ("1,003 in Spain"). However, A is hesitant to call Don Juan a "seducer" insofar as this term implies someone who gains satisfaction through "craftiness and machinations and subtle wiles" (*EO I:*98). A insists that Don Juan lacks the "reflection and consciousness" for such efforts, and that Don Juan does not even take consideration of the "means" of how he will satisfy his desire (*EO I:*98, 109). For Don Juan there is never a problematic moment in which his desire requires some further effort in order to be satisfied. Rather, Don Juan's desire is *itself* seductive for the women seduced: "He desires, and this desire acts seductively" (*EO I:*99). Don Juan represents the "incarnation" of sensuality itself, when "desire is absolutely genuine, victorious, triumphant, irresistible" (*EO I:*85).

Moreover, what Don Juan desires is strictly speaking not this or that particular woman, but sensual love *per se*. He is therefore not discriminating in taste when it comes to women, seducing even "coquettes as old as sixty" (*EO I:*:97). Don Juan's love may be all-embracing ("'every girl has what makes me happy, and therefore I take them all'"), but it is also essentially "faithless" in that as soon as he has seduced one woman he moves on to another (*EO I:*97). Thus, while his desires are always immediately satisfied, they are satisfied only momentarily: "He enjoys the satisfaction of desire; as soon as he has enjoyed it, he seeks a new object, and so it goes on indefinitely" (*EO I:*99).

Because Don Juan's desires are always immediately satisfied without further effort on his part, the world appears to him as infinitely accommodating, an abundantly fertile playland for his enjoyment. He meets with no resistance or disappointment and so his various seductions are the repetition of the same satisfying event. His life therefore does not progress, it *reposes* in the continual

repetition of the same experience: "faithlessness manifests itself in another way also: it continually becomes only repetition" (*EO I:*94). For this reason, Don Juan's life lacks the experience of time, at least in the sense of having a coherent progression of events comprising a lifetime. As A remarks, "sensuous love is the disappearance of time" (*EO I:*95). Don Juan's life is lived completely "in the moment" and his life is the "sum of *repellerende* [separate] moments that have no coherence" (*EO I:*96). The moments of his life do not cohere as the successive moments of a lifetime; they remain largely identical – yet disconnected – events.

As should be obvious, Don Juan's relations with other people revolve around the satisfaction of his own desires. Toward the women the seduces he is non-judgmental but also essentially "faithless": they are attracted to him, drawn into his existence for a moment, and then left for another woman. A admits that Don Juan deceives women in this way, but still insists that this is not due to any reflective cunning on Don Juan's behalf: "I do not think of him slyly laying his plans, subtly calculating the effect of his intrigues; that by which he deceives is the sensuous in its elemental originality, or which he is, as it were, the incarnation" (*EO I:*101). A contrasts this kind of sensual love with "psychical love," in which the other individual's self or soul is the object of affection. In seducing a woman, Don Juan does not relate to her as an individual, but simply as an occasion for sensual pleasure. Moreover, it is not only the women he seduces that Don Juan treats as a means to his satisfaction; all people with whom Don Juan has contact are enlisted into the swirling activity of his desire. Thus, he exploits the efforts of his only male companion, Leporello, "who not only, as he himself says, must hold watch outside the door but, in addition, must keep account books so complex that they would give an experienced office secretary enough to do" (*EO I:*93).

If Don Juan relates to other people as occasions for his enjoyment rather than as individuals, this is perhaps because Don Juan is himself not completely an individual. Although it is indeed Don Juan's desire that is being continually satisfied, it seems that there is nothing more to Don Juan than this desire. For

this reason, A often depicts Don Juan as the "incarnation" of pure sensuality rather than as a person seeking sensual pleasure. A marvels that Don Juan "continually hovers between being idea – that is, power, life – and being an individual" (*EO I:*92). This elusive, incomplete existence may also be explained by the fact mentioned earlier, that Don Juan's life is a series of disconnected 'moments', each of which is a repetition of the others. His entire character is manifested in this repeated gesture of seduction. Yet a momentary gesture, even if repeated indefinitely, does not constitute individual personhood, even by A's standards. He concludes that "Don Juan is a picture that is continually coming into view but does not attain form and consistency" (*EO I:*92). Hence, in relating to himself Don Juan relates to no specific individual; rather, he relates to the manifestation of "the sensuous in its elemental originality" in the form of his own desire (*EO I:*101).

Although A sometimes treats the figure of Don Juan as an ideal, it is telling that the main object of his praise in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages' is not Don Juan's successful life of immediate pleasure but Mozart's successful depiction of Don Juan in music. Perhaps part of the trouble A has in conceiving Don Juan as an actual individual is that he finds this life only *poetically* possible. A has found that the actual world (and, one suspects, actual women) to be far less accommodating than Don Juan's method of enjoyment requires. Only a poet's control of fictional circumstances could insure that someone in continual need of new sources of enjoyment was always immediately satisfied. In the actual world, the person living for enjoyment must continually strive to arrange enjoyable circumstances in order to fend off the boredom, displeasure and disappointment that life in the actual world inevitably brings with it.

This effort is made ever increasingly more difficult by the fact that whatever entertains the aesthete one moment bores him the next. As a result, the aesthete must continually scramble for new sources of enjoyment. He cannot simply repose in enjoyment as Don Juan seems to do; the life of enjoyment in the actual world requires the aesthete's unending (and most often boring) effort in

order to arrange enjoyable 'moments'. In other words, the actual aesthete is plagued by that with which Don Juan was so blissfully unconcerned: acquiring the "means" of satisfaction.

The aesthete may seek surcease of boredom in variety. (The kind of repetition that entertained Don Juan may easily bore the "sophisticated" aesthete.) Yet here the problem of means resurfaces since the aesthete still needs new sources of enjoyment, but he now needs ever more *exciting* sources of enjoyment as well. Thus, the problem of acquiring the means to satiate one's ever growing appetite is intensified. If it reaches the breaking point at which the aesthete simply cannot afford to satiate his appetite, he is lost to disappointment and boredom. If the aesthete has nearly infinite means, he may continue to meet the demand for greater and greater expenditure in order to fend off boredom. Yet even then he is bored. A explains that the failure here lies in the fact that diversions, especially the kind of eccentric diversions that wealthy, desperately bored aesthetes tend to devise, are themselves boring: a "generally eccentric diversion has boredom within itself" (*EO I:*291). Often the very means by which one seeks to banish boredom only serve to perpetuate and increase it.

To illustrate this dilemma, both A and Judge Wilhelm use the legendary figure of Nero. Nero has the whole Roman world at the disposal of his aesthetic desires, and yet Nero's all-consuming appetite is never satisfied. "One is weary of eating on porcelain and eats on silver; weary of that, one eats on gold; one burns down half of Rome in order to visualize the Trojan conflagration" (*EO I:*292). Nero's capacity to continue providing the means of immediate satisfaction are no match for the consuming power of his boredom. A concludes that this method of immediate enjoyment brings the aesthete no more (and probably far less) enjoyment than it does boredom: "This method cancels itself [...] What, after all, did Nero achieve?" (*EO I:*292).

Instead, A proposes a method of reflective enjoyment, counseling us to listen to the words of the "wiser" emperor, Marcus Aurelius: "'You can begin a new life. Only see things afresh as you used to see them. In this consists the new

life'" (*EO I:*292). A recommends a life in which one sees actual experiences "afresh" through reflective recollection. Specifically, A recommends poetic recollection in which actual experiences are poetically altered in their recollection, thereby allowing for infinite variety. He calls this the "crop rotation" method, comparing it to the farmer's practice of rotating crops.[15] A teaches that by constantly rotating the way one views the world and one's own experiences, one can forever harvest a bounty of reflective pleasure and thereby fend off boredom.

For A, "boredom is the root of all evil" (*EO I:*286). Even painful and unpleasant moments can, through the process of poetic recollection, become "piquant ingredients" in life (*EO I:*296). A finds that even the most painful and horrendous of actual circumstances can be reprocessed into a source of reflective enjoyment. He therefore deplores the fact that people try to forget only what is painful and misfortunate, claiming that this method "betrays a total one-sidedness" (*EO I:*292). Moreover, he concludes that the method of simply ignoring the painful and unpleasant is ineffective: "if one behaves as many do who dabble in the art of forgetting, who brush the unpleasant away entirely, one will soon see what good that is. In an unguarded moment, it often surprises a person with the full force of the sudden" (*EO I:*295). In contrast, the reflective aesthete "by no means wishes to forget [what is painful] – but forgets it in order to recollect it" (*EO I:*294).

With a little aesthetic flattery and poetic reconstruction, any event, no matter how painful or horrendous, can be reflectively transformed into something pleasing: "No misfortune, no adversity is so unfriendly, so deaf that it

[15] A acknowledges that the attempts to secure new and more exciting sources of immediate enjoyment, which we've just discussed, are also a form of crop rotation (*EO I:*291). Yet A's analysis of these attempts lead him to conclude that merely changing the sources of immediate pleasure (e.g. always having a different meal, a different lover, a different set of clothes) constitutes a "vulgar inartistic rotation" which is "based on an illusion" – namely, that boredom could be overcome with this method (*EO I:*291). Continuing the project of trying to secure immediate enjoyment is ultimately futile, since scrambling to find or create new and ever more exciting circumstances is itself boring. Instead of manipulating the world to make it a pleasurable place, the reflective aesthete merely manipulates his reflections of the world to make these reflections interesting and reflectively pleasing.

cannot be flattered a little; even Cerberus accepted honey cakes" (*EO I:*294). A explains that for the aesthete "it is not only young maidens one beguiles," one beguiles pain, fear and misery as well: "One talks around it and thereby deprives it of its sharpness" (*EO I:*294). Since what the aesthete enjoys in a recollection is not "the immediate object, but something else that one arbitrarily introduces," (namely his own poetic additions) he can reconstitute all the misery, pain and loneliness in his actual life into "piquant" ingredients in a rich banquet of reflective pleasure (*EO I:*299). Simply put, what is actually painful may be reflectively pleasant. A explains that "[w]hen I remember poetically, my experience has already undergone the change of having lost everything painful" (*EO I:*293).

As the greatest evil, boredom is also the source of an immense motivation for the aesthete, since what the reflective aesthete desires most is to escape it: "this effect is not of attraction but repulsion" (*EO I:*285). A claims that whoever has boredom "behind him must necessarily have infinite momentum for making discoveries" (*EO I:*286). Yet the danger, as always, is that fleeing from boredom through boring diversion only perpetuates boredom. Hence A warns that in seeking to "conquer" this root of all evil "it is primarily a matter of calm deliberation, lest, demonically possessed by boredom in an attempt to escape it, one works one's way into it" (*EO I:*291).

The way to escape boredom, A believes, is through the infinite possibilities that arise when one considers a situation reflectively, when the recollection of an event is able to be poetically altered such that "forgetting and recollecting are identical" (*EO I:*295). Immediate enjoyment requires more and more control over the circumstances in the world in order to produce the means of enjoyment. Reflective enjoyment attempts to escape this problem of means by shifting the focus of pleasure-seeking from what happens in actuality to how this is recollected in reflection. Reflective enjoyment simply requires control over one's own powers of forgetting and recollecting. Thus A declares that all reflective 'crop rotations' fall under "the universal rule of the relation between

recollecting and *forgetting*. It is in these two currents that life moves, and therefore it is a matter of having them properly under one's control" (*EO I:*292).

Being able to control how one forgets and recollects experiences constitutes a curious kind of self-control. It requires what A calls "the principle of limitation, the sole saving principle in the world" (*EO I:*292). The reflective aesthete avoids indulging so much in any experience that he cannot become reflectively detached from it: "From the beginning, one curbs enjoyment and does not hoist full sail for any decision; one indulges with a certain mistrust" (*EO I:*293). A specifies that this detachment requires the abandonment of all hope, since hope interferes with an aesthete's ability to become reflectively detached from actuality. Hope expresses some non-arbitrary concern for something in actuality; it thereby opens the door to disappointment. Therefore, A declares, "Not until hope is thrown overboard does one begin to live artistically; as long as a person hopes, he cannot limit himself" (*EO I:*292). For this same reason, A recommends refraining from valuing anything too highly: "The person who runs aground with the speed of hope will recollect in such a way that he will be unable to forget. Thus *nil admirari* [marvel at nothing] is the proper wisdom of life. No part of life ought to have so much meaning for a person that he cannot forget it any moment he wants to" (*EO I:*293).

Instead, A recommends selecting arbitrary events and treating them as if they were absolutely important – at least for a moment, then one should forget them. Limiting oneself to arbitrary interests insures a "resourcefulness" in finding reflective amusement even in a boring world. He gives the example of the solitary prisoner for whom "a spider can be a source of great amusement" and schoolchildren subjected to a boring teacher for whom even raindrops can serve as great entertainment: "How entertaining it can be to listen to the monotonous dripping on the roof! What a meticulous observer one becomes" (*EO I:*292). He also adds an example from his own life. He is periodically obliged to listen to the boring philosophical ramblings of an acquaintance (could it be Judge Wilhelm?). On the verge of despair, he discovered that by

concentrating on the rivulets of sweat that rolled down the philosopher's forehead and converged on the end of his nose, he was able to remain completely fascinated: "From that moment on, everything was changed; I could even have the delight of encouraging him to commence his philosophical instruction just in order to watch the perspiration on his brow and nose" (*EO I:*299). The key to finding enjoyment in such mundane events is the arbitrary way that they are selected:

> Arbitrariness is the whole secret. [...] One does not enjoy the immediate object but something else that one arbitrarily introduces. One sees the middle of a play; one reads the third section of a book. One thereby has enjoyment quite different from what the author so kindly intended. One enjoys something totally accidental; one considers the whole of existence from this standpoint; one lets reality run aground on this. (*EO I:*299)

As we have seen, A explains that only completely arbitrary interests allow one to make an accidental part of a boring world into something worthy of absolute admiration: "It is very advantageous to let the realities of life be undifferentiated in an arbitrary interest like that. Something accidental is made into the absolute and as such into an object of absolute admiration" (*EO I:*299-300). He reports that "[f]or many people this method is an excellent means of stimulation. Everything is regarded as a wager, etc. The more consistently a person knows how to sustain his arbitrariness, the more amusing the combinations become" (*EO I:*300). Thus while the reflective aesthete's highest value is reflective enjoyment, this requires a renunciation of all lasting values and attachments. One must instead view all of existence from the detached stance of arbitrariness in order to secure reflective enjoyment.

What does it mean that the reflective aesthete "lets his reality run aground" on arbitrariness? It means that for him all of existence is considered according to his method of selecting arbitrary and accidental occasions to reflectively enjoy. Just as Don Juan treated the world as a playland for the satisfaction of his desire, A treats the world as a collection of arbitrary, accidental

occasions which can be forgotten and poetically recollected at will in order to satisfy his desire for reflective enjoyment. As a result, A is not really at home in actuality. A compares himself with a bird of prey which lives aloft and only swoops down into actuality in order to capture morsels of actual experience to enjoy in the safety of reflection: "I swoop down into actuality and snatch my prey, but I do not stay down there. I bring my booty home" (*EO I:*42).

A does not abide in actuality because he sees the actual world as thoroughly saturated with the greatest evil, boredom. For A, boredom has a ubiquitous, "pantheistic" existence in the world: "Boredom rests upon the nothing that interlaces existence [*Tilvaerelsen*]; its dizziness is infinite, like that which comes from looking down into a bottomless abyss" (*EO I:*291). He poetically describes boredom as a cosmic curse which only grows with the passing generations:

> The gods were bored; therefore they created human beings. Adam was bored because he was alone; therefore Eve was created. Since that moment, boredom entered the world and grew in exact proportion to the growth of the population. Adam was bored alone; then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*. After that, the population of the world increased and the nations were bored *en masse*. (*EO I:*286)

A proposes to escape the curse of boredom by escaping actuality and fleeing into reflective recollection. This method does not ignore actuality altogether, but it reconstructs it poetically in such a way that the aesthete has control over what parts of actuality he will experience and how he will experience them. Such control is essential for the aesthete since, as A remarks, "enjoyment consists not in what I enjoy but in getting my own way" (*EO I:*31). The reflective aesthete's tools for getting his own way are forgetting and recollection. These are utilized together in an artistic reconstruction of the world in which the reflective aesthete plays Creator: in recollection he creates the world exactly as he wants it to be, transforming actual circumstances into fantastical ones. The "artistically achieved identity" between forgetting and recollecting "is

the Archimedean point with which one lifts the whole world" (*EO I:*295). A therefore claims that when "the individual has perfected himself in the art of forgetting and the art of recollecting in this way, he is then able to play shuttlecock with all existence" (*EO I:*294).

Regarding others, A has strict regulations insuring detachment and freedom from any close relationships. For example, A warns that one should guard against friendship, which he finds boring. Instead, one should form 'interesting contacts' with people, letting these relationships "take a deeper turn now and then, provided that one always – even though keeping the same pace for a time – has the reserve speed to run away from them" (*EO I:*296). Such parting may be unpleasant and may be thought to leave "unpleasant recollections," but A claims this is a misunderstanding since "unpleasantness is indeed a piquant ingredient in the perverseness of life. Moreover, the same relationship can regain significance in another way" (*EO I:*296). Actual relationships do not need to be cultivated or maintained: even if in actuality the relationship comes to an end, through reflection it may be sustained and even enhanced.[16]

A also warns against marriage: "Never become involved in marriage" since one "must always guard against contracting a life relationship by which one can become many" (*EO I:*296)[17]. (A waves off as "mysterious talk" any mention of marriage partners becoming unified.) The problem with 'becoming many' is that the aesthete loses his freedom to pursue enjoyment in whatever arbitrary way strikes his fancy:

> If an individual is many, he has lost his freedom and cannot order his riding boots when he wishes, cannot knock about according to whim.

[16] It is interesting to apply this idea to Kierkegaard's own relationship with Regine Olsen. Their engagement became the occasion for numerous reflections in Kierkegaard's writings and Kierkegaard developed the idea that, although he had broken the engagement and she had married another man, they were still bonded in a higher spiritual union. See, for example, Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, (Cambridge, 2001), 201.

[17] A's worry about 'becoming many' is perhaps irony on Kierkegaard's part, since the aesthete is notoriously multifarious, lacking any unity within himself.

> If he has a wife it is difficult; if he has a wife and perhaps children, it is formidable; if he has a wife and children, it is impossible. (*EO I:*297)

Lastly, A warns against taking any "official post" by which one becomes "just a plain John Anyman, a tiny little cog in the machine of the body politic" (*EO I:*298). One problem with taking such a position is that it is boring: "The law under which one slaves is equally boring no matter whether advancement is swift or slow" (*EO I:*298). Having an official position also means that the "individual ceases to be himself the manager of the operation, and then theories can be of little help" (*EO I:*298). In other words, like marriage, an official position prevents the reflective aesthete from limiting himself to completely arbitrary and accidental interests. But A makes clear that "one should nevertheless not be inactive" (*EO I:*298). Rather, he recommends busying oneself with "all the pursuits that are compatible with aimlessness; all kinds of unprofitable pursuits may be carried on" (*EO I:*298).

These restrictions obviously leave the reflective aesthete without genuine companionship of any kind. They also leave him relating to himself in a very odd way. His actuality, like all other actuality, is consumed in the satisfaction of his desire for reflective enjoyment: the actual facts and events of his life are forgotten by him in order to be poetically recollected in his mind. In other words, the reflective aesthete engages in a deliberate effort to deceive himself in order to entertain himself. He forgets his actual experiences in order to entertain himself with a poetically enhanced version of his own life. But his "recollections" are poetically enhanced precisely in order to avoid facing the actual reality of his daily life (i.e., to avoid boredom). The reflective aesthete would like to be present in his poetic recollections rather than in the actuality of the present moment: he avoids his actual life and actual self by 'recollecting' a

poetically invented life and self.[18] Therefore, A's relationship with his own actuality is one of evasion.

The reflective aesthete seeks to solve the immediate aesthete's self-perpetuated 'problem of means' by establishing a kind of reflective self-subsistence. The mechanism of recollection can entertain indefinitely, needing only arbitrary bits of actuality as occasion for reflection – a fuel readily found even in a boring world. By being present to himself in recollection (and absent to himself in actuality) the reflective aesthete hopes to live blissfully free from the boredom and disappointment that so haunted the immediate aesthete.

As we have discussed, being present in one's "recollections" rather than in the actual circumstances of one's life requires a detachment from actuality. This detachment of the reflective aesthete is not unlike that of the devoted ascetic: it requires renouncing substantial relations with others and all concerns within the world. Both asceticism and reflective aestheticism also demand the renunciation oneself as an actual particular person. Yet the ascetic renounces the world and himself for some higher good in which he passionately believes, whereas the reflective aesthete renounces the world and himself only in order to reconstruct it for himself. More significantly, the aesthete abstains from having the kind of deeply held commitments which motivate the ascetic. Unlike the ascetic, the reflective aesthete must refrain from attaching any non-arbitrary value or meaning to anything.

In living as if everything were arbitrary, the reflective aesthete must also regard himself as something arbitrary. That A considers his own life under the concept of arbitrariness is revealed in his philosophy of 'either/or.'[19] In the *Diapsalmata* A delivers an "ecstatic discourse" in which he compares various

[18] In 'The Unhappiest One" A poses the problem that unless recollections have reality for the one who recollects, the reflective aesthete cannot become present in them (*EO I*:223). In this case, he is present to himself in neither actuality nor recollection; he is lost to himself, a fate A deems the unhappiest of all.
[19] Both the aesthete A and Judge Wilhelm have a theory of 'either/or'. The aesthetic conception of 'either/or' signifies the arbitrariness between two (or more) options whereas the ethical conception of 'either/or' signifies a fundamental choice between dramatically different options.

options for how to act and cynically concludes that it is arbitrary which option one chooses:

> Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way. Laugh at the stupidities of the world, and you will regret it; weep over them, and you will regret it. [...] Whether you laugh at the stupidities of the world or you weep over them, you will regret it either way. [...] Hang yourself, and you will regret it. Do not hang yourself, and you will regret it. Hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way. (*EO I:*38)

A declares this philosophy of 'either/or' is "the quintessence of all the wisdom of life" and therefore recommends that one remain "continually *aeterno modo* [in the mode of eternity]" by remaining reflectively detached from any actual circumstance. To this end the reflective aesthete must be willing to continually vary not only his interests, he must continually vary himself: "The eye with which one sees actuality must be changed continually" (*EO I:*300). A goes so far as to say that this poetic invention or alteration of one's self is the key to the success of his 'crop rotation' method: "so also must one continually vary oneself, and this is the real secret" (*EO I:*298).

In order to vary oneself, one must be in control of oneself. To this end, A states that "it is essential to have control over one's moods" (*EO I:*299). Why does A think control over one's moods is so essential? Perhaps because it is only in certain moods that A can be fascinated by arbitrary morsels of actuality. When certain unfavorable moods strike him he cannot bring himself to find any interest (let alone *absolute* interest) in the arbitrary. Yet A admits that he has no more control over his moods than the sailor has control over the storm at sea. At most, he can simply anticipate the coming of a mood and calculate its probable effect:

> To have them [one's moods] under control in the sense that one can produce them at will is an impossibility, but prudence teaches us to utilize the moment. Just as an experienced sailor always scans the sea and detects a squall far in advance, so one should always detect a mood a little in advance. Before entering into a mood, one should

> know its effect on oneself and its probable effect on others" (*EO I:*298-299)

Whether or not the reflective aesthete can successfully escape the storm of his own uncooperative moods, the important question remaining is: What is the self that the reflective aesthete thinks he must continually vary? For A this self is nothing but the "eye with which one sees actuality," that which experiences and enjoys, first immediately and then reflectively. The self which is subjected to actual experience is treated like a stage actor: its sole value and purpose is to entertain the self which reflectively enjoys recollecting this experience. This split within the aesthete's self is something the project of reflective enjoyment cannot do without. Both immediate actor and reflective audience are required, and a strict separation between them is necessary to insure reflective detachment. Moreover, the split grows more manifold: there must also be a part of the aesthete's self which acts like a stage director, selecting arbitrary occasions from actuality, directing the actor in his arbitrary actions, and poetically reconstructing these occasions for himself in recollection. Looking more closely at the passage in which A introduces his 'bird of prey' analogy will reveal the multiplicity into which A's self disintegrates:

> I swoop down into actuality and snatch my prey, but I do not stay down there. I bring my booty home, and this booty is a picture I weave into the tapestries at my castle. Then I live as one already dead. Everything I have experienced I immerse in a baptism of oblivion unto an eternity of recollection. Everything temporal and fortuitous is forgotten and blotted out. Then I sit like an old gray-haired man, pensive, and explain the pictures in a soft voice, almost whispering, and beside me sits a child, listening, although he remembers everything before I tell it. (*EO I:*42)

Although the reflective aesthete flees his actual self, he is also dependent on it, just as the director and audience depend upon the actor. This dependency is apparent in the way A discusses the need for self-awareness: "In order to be able to recollect in this way, one must be aware of how one lives, especially of

how one enjoys" (*EO I:*293). The reflective aesthete would like to vacate his actual life, and yet he must continue to peer into his actual life as the object of absolute (if momentary) interest. He must continually "swoop down" into his own actuality in order to feed his appetite for reflective enjoyment. Like Don Juan, the reflective aesthete treats others as a means to 'having his own way' and yet, oddly enough, the reflective aesthete also treats *himself* as a means to this end.

Whereas the immediate aesthete tries to immerse himself in immediate enjoyment, the reflective aesthete tries to immerse himself in himself; he tries to dissolve his actuality in the universal solvent of his own reflection. The actual part of himself is absorbed in the role of an arbitrary actor, existing merely as a means of reflective entertainment. In turn, the reflective parts of himself try to become absorbed in poetic fascination with the arbitrary experiences of his actual self. A thinks that the immediate aesthete's life lacks continuity, but the same could be said of him. His life might be even more fragmentary than Don Juan's, for he lacks even the consistency afforded by Don Juan's single-minded desire or by the repetition of the same gesture of seduction. Within the reflective aesthete's self, everything must be variable in order to insure detachment and the freedom to recreate himself as he wishes to be. Thus, his life plan requires that he be infinitely multifarious, fluid, and variable.

As promised, I will end this section by discussing the "poet existence" manifested by A himself. So far we have described the reflective aesthete as someone who attempts to entertain himself with reflective recollections of his life. The 'poet,' in A's sense, is someone who has succumbed to boredom and has given up all hope of entertaining himself.[20] Although A is lost to boredom, he nonetheless transforms the torture of his boredom into writings which others

[20] When A proposes the reflective escape from actuality in 'The Rotation of Crops' he assures us that "the fakery is successful for the adept" (*EO I:*295). Yet there are subtle indications throughout his writings (and explicit indications in 'The Unhappiest One' and 'Diapsalmata') that in fact this project of reflective escape fails. For example, A complains that his way of life is "utterly meaningless," and "dreadful, not to be endured" (*EO I:*36, 24). I will defer the analysis of the failure of the reflective aesthetic way of life for the chapter on despair.

find interesting. Boredom and suffering torture poetic productions out of the poet, and these bring aesthetic pleasure to others. A's favorite metaphor for the 'poet existence' is the victims roasted inside the tyrant Phalaris' bronze bull, whose screams escape the mouthpiece of the bull in the form of pleasing music:

> What is a poet? An unhappy person who conceals profound anguish in his heart but whose lips are so formed that as sighs and cries pass over them they sound like beautiful music. It is with him as with the poor wretches in Phalaris's bronze bull, who were slowly tortured over a slow fire; their screams could not reach the tyrant's ears to terrify him; to him they sounded like sweet music. (*EO I*:19)

I should immediately add that Kierkegaard does not think that every poet or artist lives an aesthetic way of life. (Especially when comparing Kierkegaard to Nietzsche, there is a temptation to draw a hasty contrast by saying that a thinker like Nietzsche values the artistic life quite highly, whereas Kierkegaard regards the artistic life as the lowest.) As Mackey points out, the aesthetic life is called "aesthetic" not in reference to artwork or the study of art and beauty (aesthetics), but in reference to *aisthesis* "sense perception."[21] For Kierkegaard, someone who is a poet or artist may be living an aesthetic, ethical, or religious way of life. (This holds for any other profession or pursuit; as we have seen, what defines a way of life is not some external role, but an internal evaluative orientation.) Some of Kierkegaard's own pseudonyms are presented as non-aesthete poets (Johannes de Silentio, for example, is a poet living a life of resignation.) Likewise, Kierkegaard often regarded himself as a religious kind of poet, or at least upheld this as an ideal for himself.

Thus, what makes the 'poet existence' in A's sense unique is not the act of poetic production, but the fact that this poetic production is put in the service of the highest aesthetic value: alleviating boredom. The specifically aesthetic poet like A no longer strives to be interested or entertained by anything in life. But the value of entertainment and surcease of boredom is not given up. The poet

[21]Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 3.

resigns himself to a life of boredom and suffering, but reserves for himself the rare and privileged position of being able to entertain others even as he remain bored (*EO I*:288).

§2 THE ETHICAL WAY OF LIFE

As we saw in the last chapter, the aesthetic way of life could be divided into an immediate and a reflective approach to obtaining enjoyment; the reflective approach to enjoyment is an attempt to correct the failure of the immediate approach while remaining within aesthetic categories. In the same way, the ethical way of life can be divided into the life of self-responsibility advanced by the pseudonym Judge Wilhelm and the life of resignation (also called "Religiousness A") advanced by Johannes de Silentio of *Fear and Trembling* and Johannes Climacus of *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The life of resignation can be understood as an attempt to correct the failures of the life of ethical self-responsibility while remaining within ethical categories.

It may seem odd to include the way of life described as "Religiousness A" within the ethical rather than the religious way of life, but this designation is Kierkegaard's own. What both approaches have in common such that they are both "ethical" in Kierkegaard's thinking is that they are both grounded in *self-reliance* (what Kierkegaard sometimes calls the domain of "immanence.")[22] Judge Wilhelm believes that every individual can, by his own will, achieve a secure, happy and ethically upright existence in the world by taking responsibility for himself. As a first step, taking responsibility for oneself requires what he calls "repentance," accepting one's guilt for past wrongdoings. Having repented, the ethical "individual rests with confident security in the assurance that his life is ethically structured" (*EO II*:257). Writers representing the life of resignation believe that self-reliance can take the individual only as far as repentance and no

[22] See, for example, *PS*:559,532,560-1.

further. Each of these manifestations of the ethical way of life will be explained in turn.

Judge Wilhelm is known to us primarily through two lengthy epistles he sends to the aesthete A; these letters, along with a sermon sent to the judge from a priest in Juttland, comprise the second volume of *Either/Or*. In addition, *Stages on Life's Way* includes a manuscript by Judge Wilhelm entitled "Some Reflections on Marriage." (According to its introduction in *Stages*, this manuscript has been stolen from the judge's study by Victor Eremita, the pseudonymous editor of *Either/Or*, after a night of merriment and speeches on erotic love by various aesthetes.) As is his usual practice, Kierkegaard has carefully crafted his spokesman for this way of life to stand as a concrete representation of it. The judge is a stolid middle-class burgher, a married man and a father. For him, marriage is the primary example of the type of ethical commitment by which a person gains a joyful, secure place in the everyday world through his own self-reliant strength of resolve.

Judge Wilhelm approaches A from the standpoint of the ethical "life-view" (as he calls it), but he is sensitive to the fact that A does not share this life-view. He therefore generally refrains from criticizing A on ethical grounds. Instead, he employs a two-fold method for wrenching A from his adherence to the aesthetic way of life. First, he presents the ethical way of life as valuable according to aesthetic categories. Thus, his first letter to A is entitled "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage." He argues that it is only in the ethical way of life that the world becomes the beautiful and happy place the aesthete wants it to be (*EO II*:178,275). As the judge explains, it is only when enjoyment is no longer one's highest goal, only when one achieves a confident, secure place in the world through one's own ethical will and commitment that one can actually enjoy life and see it according to its beauty. "If only the choice is posited, all the aesthetic returns, and you will see that only thereby does existence become beautiful" (*EO II*:178). Judge Wilhelm promises that the ethical person can "save his own soul and win the whole world" (*EO* II:178). Thus, the ethical way of life incorporates

the aesthetic *telos* and fulfills it for the first time. The ethical way of life is enjoyable precisely because within it the aesthetic *telos* is no longer the highest *telos* of one's life.

Secondly, Judge Wilhelm wants to reveal to A how the life lived for enjoyment undermines itself, how it collapses internally and fails to satisfy its own criteria. To a large extent this task is already done for him: as we've seen, A realizes that the life of enjoyment inevitably leads to the antithesis of enjoyment: boredom. But A understands this failure aesthetically, as a fact about the world rather than a fact about himself and the way he lives. As he makes humorously evident in the 'boredom of the gods' passage, A reads boredom into the heart of existence, as an inescapable evil. The same pattern of interpreting aesthetic failure according to the aesthetic categories is found in A's "poet existence." As explained in the last section, A's remedial solution to the collapse of the aesthetic life is to live in such a way that the torture of living this failed way of life produces aesthetic pleasure for others.

Judge Wilhelm's aim is to get A to despair of the aesthetic way of life *in the right way*, to have the despair which brings the aesthetic way of life to an end rather than the halfhearted despair utilized by the poet for entertainment value, i.e., *aesthetic* value. Although a full explanation of the internal collapse of the aesthetic way of life will have to wait until the chapter on despair, we will need to understand the basics of Judge Wilhelm's notion of the despair of the aesthetic way of life in order to understand the contrast he draws with the ethical way of life. According to the judge, "*the person who says that he want to enjoy life always posits a condition that either lies outside the individual or is within the individual in such a way that it is not there by virtue of the individual himself*" (*EO II*:180). Despair, according to Judge Wilhelm, is living in such a way that what one values most in life, the conditions for one's success in life, lie outside of oneself. In contrast, what is valued most in the ethical life (ethical goodness, having one's life "ethically structured"), and the condition for success in this way of life

(strength of resolve, a sense of ethical commitment, etc.), always lie within the individual.

While A prefers to think of the aesthetic way of life as rare and refined, Judge Wilhelm explains that he shares the aesthetic way of life with a variety of people whom A looks down upon as 'not knowing how to enjoy life' (*EO II*:180,191-7). As discussed in the last chapter, the judge outlines seven versions or "stages" of the aesthetic way of life differentiated according to the external condition for which a person lives: (1) beauty or health, (2) money, honors or status, (3) talent, (4) the immediate fulfillment of desire, (5) reflective enjoyment, (6) cynical renunciation, and (7) poetic expression of the "nothingness" and despair of life. As Judge Wilhelm's definition of despair indicates, some of these conditions certainly lie within the individual (e.g. talent), but even here the question is whether or not the person takes responsibility for developing and exercising this talent. The person who fails to do so remains in the aesthetic sphere as someone who is merely "absorbed in his own accidental traits," whereas the person who takes the development and exercise of his talent as a task lives ethically (*EO II*:260).

According to Judge Wilhelm, the "life nerve" of the ethical way of life is the act of "choosing oneself" (*EO II*:211). Simply put, 'choosing oneself' means taking responsibility for oneself. This involves taking responsibility for one's present and future actions, as well as for all one's past actions. Responsibility thereby grants the ethical person the continuity in time that the aesthete lacks. While the aesthete seeks to lose himself in the dispersion of enjoyment, the ethical person seeks to gain possession of himself through self-responsibility. Judge Wilhelm is careful to point out that choosing oneself means choosing to take responsibility for the concrete, particular person one actually is; he repeatedly warns against confusing the need to choose oneself with the idea that one can *create* oneself (*EO II*:215,217,258,260,332). As he explains:

> [T]he person who chooses himself ethically chooses himself concretely as this specific individual [...] with these capacities, these inclinations, these drives, these passions, influenced by this specific social milieu, as this specific product of a specific environment. But as he becomes aware of all this, he takes upon himself responsibility for it all. (*EO II*:251)

Choosing oneself entails accepting oneself as a product of various external influences and yet acknowledging oneself as an agent responsible for how these influences manifest themselves in present and future action. Although Judge Wilhelm thinks that most of what a person is as an individual is given by factors beyond the individual's control, he believes every individual has the ability to be "his own editor" whose task "it is chiefly to order, shape, temper, inflame, control – in short, to produce an evenness in the soul, a harmony" (*EO II*:262). The Judge notes a continuity between the ethical duty to act responsibly and the ethical duty to form oneself, since performing responsible actions also helps to develop oneself into a responsible agent: "he engages in the affairs of life as this specific personality. Here his task is not to form himself but to act, and yet he forms himself at the same time" (*EO II*:263).

By taking responsibility for himself as a task in these ways, the individual gains possession over himself as a whole. He thereby achieves what Judge Wilhelm calls "sovereignty over himself":

> An individual thus chooses himself as a complex specific concretion and therefore choose himself in his continuity. This concretion is the individual's actuality, but he chooses according to freedom , it may also be said that it is his possibility or, in order not to use such an esthetic expression, it is his task. [...] in seeing his possibility as his task, the individual expresses precisely his sovereignty over himself, something he never surrenders. (*EO II*:251).

As mentioned above, Judge Wilhelm thinks a necessary step in choosing oneself is taking responsibility for one's past wrongdoings; this is what he calls "repentance." In choosing oneself, one does not get to start with a 'clean slate', ethically speaking. Judge Wilhelm assumes that every actual person has at least some things of which they are guilty; to pretend otherwise would be to try to

'create oneself.' Therefore, in choosing myself ethically I choose myself as guilty, and in taking responsibility for myself I take responsibility for this guilt: "for only when I choose myself as guilty do I absolutely choose myself, if I am at all to choose myself absolutely in such a way that it is not identical with creating myself" (*EO II*:216-7).

Somewhat oddly, Judge Wilhelm thinks that it is not only one's own wrongdoings that must be repented. He adds: "And even though it was the father's guilt that was passed on to the son by inheritance, he repents of this, too." (*EO II*:217). He even suggests that the ethical individual repents of everything that is "hard" and "painful" in the entire history of the human race preceding him since "he is the person he is only through this history" (*EO II*:216). According to Judge Wilhelm, the ethical person gains possession of himself through self-choice only by refusing to quibble over what aspects or conditions of his self he includes in the scope of his responsibility and freedom (*EO II*:218). In contrast to those who refuse "to repent of the guilt of the forefathers" out of "a faintheartedness of the soul" or "lack of magnanimity," Judge Wilhelm sees it as a "sign of a high-minded person and a deep soul if he is inclined to repent, if he does not take God to court but repents and loves God in his repentance" (*EO II*:218,237).

As this quote suggests, Judge Wilhelm believes an ethical person's relationship to God is primarily expressed in this act of repentance (*EO II*:216). Yet elsewhere he adds that an ethical person's love of God is expressed by joyfully accepting his or her life in the world (*EO II*:244). Here Judge Wilhelm draws a contrast between the ethical way of life he recommends and the ascetic life (that of the pagan "Stoic" or Christian "mystic"), a distinction he emphasizes in both *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*. In contrast to the 'positive' commitment of the person who takes responsibility for his activities in the world, the ascetic life is structured by a 'negative' commitment to renouncing himself, his life in the world, and the world as a whole (*SLW*:108). Judge Wilhelm criticizes the ascetic for "rejecting the existence, the actuality, in which God has

placed him, because he thereby actually rejects God's love or demands another expression for it than that which God wills to give" (*EO II*:244). In addition, the judge regards it as a "deception" for the ascetic to pretend that he has the right to reject his relationships with other people, especially the particular individuals with whom his life is "bound" (*EO II*:244).

In contrast, the ethical person as Judge Wilhelm conceives him has the "cheerful boldness" to accept his life in the world with joy and love. Judge Wilhelm repeatedly points out that the ethical person who claims his life by taking responsibility for it "loves man's life in this world" (*EO II*:327,328,332). Having achieved "absolute continuity with the actuality to which he belongs," the ethical person is at home in the world and is able to perceive "the significance even of the insignificant" (*EO II*:248,222). In becoming at home in the world in this way, Judge Wilhelm's ethical person distinguishes himself from the aesthete as well as the ascetic. As the judge explains to the aesthete A, "the world is an oppression to you because it seems to want to be something different for you than it can be, so it is also true that when in despair you have found yourself you will love it because it is what it is" (*EO II*:208).

Joyfully accepting one's life in the world entails accepting one's relationships with other people and becoming open and sympathetic with them (*EO II*:322). In taking responsibility for his particular actuality, the ethical person relates to other people according to the roles and duties he finds himself within: e.g. as father, as husband, as judge. In agreement with Aristotle, the judge also points out that true friendship is possible only within an ethical way of life (*EO II*:321-3). As Judge Wilhelm explains, a person finds his duty internally, within the concrete particular circumstances of his life, not within the "abstract-categorical" in the manner of Kant's ethics (*EO II*:322). What is universal about ethics is the general requirement to do one's duty, but each person has his or her own duties (*EO II*:263). Thus, Judge Wilhelm notes a significant difference between his ethics and traditional formulations of ethics in that for him ethics does not require that one abrogate one's particularity in order

to attain ethical goodness ('the universal'): "the person who lives ethically expresses the universal in his life. He makes himself the universal human being, not by taking off his concretion, for then he becomes a complete non-entity, but by putting it on and interpenetrating it with the universal" (*EO II*:256). Therefore the Judge finds that "[e]very person, if he so wills, can become a paradigmatic human being, not by brushing off his accidental qualities, but by remaining in them and ennobling them. But he ennobles them by choosing them" (*EO II*:262). Echoing Pindar's call to "become what you are" (an idea much beloved by Nietzsche), the Judge declares that the person who ennobles the traits and circumstances of his particular life by taking responsibility for them "becomes the person he becomes" (*EO II*:225). The aesthete, by contrast, views himself as what he immediately is (a collection of needs, desires and talents over which he refuses to assume responsibility). Judge Wilhelm sums up this point by saying that the aesthetic "is that in a person whereby he immediately is the person he is; the ethical is that whereby a person becomes what he becomes" (*EO II*:225).

In taking responsibility for his life as a task, the ethical person finds both his duties and his place in the world. Because this can all be achieved self-reliantly, "the truly ethical person has an inner serenity and sense of security" (*EO II*:254). For this reason, Judge Wilhelm claims that the ethical way of life "makes the individual infinitely secure within himself" (*EO II*:255). As mentioned above, the judge believes it is only in this state of self-reliantly achieved security that life becomes beautiful and enjoyable. As the he says to A, "Life then becomes rich in beauty for me, not impoverished in beauty, as it actually is for you" (*EO II*:275). He presses his case against A by showing that the ethical life "is so far from depriving life of its beauty that it expressly gives it beauty. It gives life peace, safety, and security" (*EO II*:323).

Having explained the highest *telos* of Judge Wilhelm's ethical way of life and how one relates to oneself, others and the world when pursuing this telos, we turn now to the second manifestation of the ethical life: the life of resignation.

While a full accounting of the despair of Judge Wilhelm's life of self-responsibility will have to wait until the chapter on despair, we will need to introduce some of its basic faults in order to understand the life of resignation. The basic flaw in Judge Wilhelm's way of life can be discussed according to two inter-related issues: guilt and the inability, through one's own efforts, to gain a serene and happy existence at home in the world. Although Judge Wilhelm's goal of having such a happy, secure existence and a love of everyday life is preserved (and fulfilled) in the life of faith, there are indications even within the Judge's own letters that his claim to have achieved this kind of existence is a fraud. For example, he confesses:

> It sometimes happens to me – to be sure, very rarely now, for I try to counteract it, since I consider it a husband's duty to be of about the same age as his wife – it sometimes happens that I sit and collapse [*sinker sammen*, literally to 'sink together'] into myself. I have taken care of my work; I have no desire for any diversion, and something melancholy in my temperament gains the upper hand over me. I become many years older than I actually am, and I practically become a stranger to my home life. I can very well see that it is beautiful, but I look at it with different eyes than usual. It seems to me as if I were an old man, my wife my happily married younger sister in whose house I am sitting. In such hours, time almost begins to drag for me. (*EO II*:307)

At such times, the judge feels "desolate and lost," a "stranger" to the everyday world he has claimed to achieve through self-responsibility. As he admits, his only salvation in such times is to watch his wife, who remains busily engaged in everyday tasks. The judge complacently explains that as a woman, his wife's domain is the finite, and thus she is at no risk of becoming a stranger to everyday existence like he does: "Now if my wife were a man, the same thing would perhaps happen to her, and we might both come to a halt, but she is a woman and in harmony with time" (*EO II*:307). Only by watching his wife's happy immersion in household tasks is the judge able to regain his own sense of being at home in the world and in time: "When I am sitting this way, desolate and lost, and then I watch my wife moving lightly and youthfully around the

room, always busy...I participate in everything she is doing, and in the end I find myself within time again, time has a meaning for me again, and the moment hurries along" (*EO II*:307). The judge theorizes about dependence on his wife in general terms: "Woman explains the finite; man pursues the infinite. This is the way it must be" (*EO II*:311).

The extent of this dependence is revealed in his admission that "[t]he reason she is everything to man is that she presents him with the finite; without her he is an unstable spirit, an unhappy creature who cannot find rest, has no abode." (*EO II*:313). The fact that the judge depends on his wife to rescue him from becoming desolate and lost to the world obviously contradicts his claim to gain the world through his own self-reliant efforts. The extent of this dependence on his wife, and perhaps also his worries about being so dependent, are reflected in his uncharacteristically angry – even hateful – response to the issue of women's liberation.[23] This dependence indicates that the judge's own life clearly runs afoul of his own warnings against despair, understood as having the condition of one's success in life outside oneself.

A challenge to Judge Wilhelm's treatment of the issue of guilt can be found in the *Ultimatum* of *Either/Or*. The *Ultimatum* is a sermon sent to the judge by a Juttland priest on the theme that "in relation to God we are always in the wrong." Although the judge claims that the sermon "has grasped what I have said and what I would like to have said," the emphasis on the fact that 'before God' we are always guilty has subtle but devastating implications for Judge Wilhelm's ethics (*EO II*:338). As we have seen, Judge Wilhelm understands as the first step toward self-choice the act of recognizing one's guilt ("choose oneself as guilty") and repenting of this guilt. This first step is then immediately

[23] Having explained how woman is "man's deepest life" in that she "explains finitude" he goes on: "This is why I hate all that detestable rhetoric about the emancipation of women. God forbid that it may ever happen. I cannot tell you with what pain the thought can pierce my soul, nor what passionate indignation, what hate, I harbor toward anyone who dares to express such ideas [...]if this infection were to spread, if it pushed its way through even to her whom I love, my wife, my joy, my refuge, the root of my life, yes, then my courage would be crushed, then freedom's passion in my soul would be exhausted. Then I know very well what I would do – I would sit in the market place and weep, weep like that artist whose work had been destroyed and even he could not remember what it represented." (*EO II*:311-2)

followed by the second step of claiming one's place in the world, made "infinitely secure" and serenely happy through one's own self-reliant powers of ethical vigilance and self-responsibility. The question remains: how, having repented and having found oneself guilty, could one possibly move on to the second step of living happily and securely in the world, serenely trusting in one's own ethical rectitude? How could it be, as the judge claims, that the ethical individual faces his guilt and yet "rests with confident security in the assurance than his life is ethically structured"? Representatives of the life of resignation claim that a genuine recognition of one's guilt in fact *precludes* this second step: having faced one's guilt, one simply cannot live serenely confident in one's own powers of ethical vigilance and self-responsibility. Instead, the most one can do is to genuinely repent, to live a life of repentance which entails a renunciation of the world, substantial relations with others, and oneself.

In contrast to Judge Wilhelm, the Juttland priest and other representatives of resignation do not think the individual can go beyond repentance and resignation. The priest's sermon indicates the most you can do is face your own guilt and repent, finding "rest and joy only in this, that you might always be in the wrong" (*EO II*:349). The same point is put more forcefully by Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author and 'knight' of resignation who ponders the Abraham story in *Fear and Trembling*. As he explains in a footnote: "once sin makes its appearance ethics comes to grief precisely on the question of repentance. Repentance is the highest ethical expression but for that very reason the most profound ethical self-contradiction" (*FT*:124fn). The self-contradiction within ethics lies in the fact that what ethics (in Judge Wilhelm's sense) values as highest is the morally upright life, achieved self-reliantly by taking responsibility for oneself. But truly taking responsibility for oneself leads inevitably to the conclusion that one has failed to live the morally upright life, since anyone who looks hard enough will find at least something of which he or she is guilty. In other words, pursuing the highest *telos* of the ethical life leads only, and at most, to the acknowledgment that one has failed to attain this highest *telos*.

The inevitability of failure to live the self-reliant moral life Judge Wilhelm recommends can be explained by considering a fundamental asymmetry that exists with respect to self-reliance: one can, by one's own self-reliant actions, get oneself *into* a state of guilt but one cannot, by one's own self-reliant actions, get oneself *out of* a state of guilt. In Kierkegaard's thinking, what is needed to get out of a state of guilt is forgiveness. But one cannot forgive oneself[24], nor can further good deeds necessarily annul the guilt of previous misdeeds. The fact that one has self-reliantly gotten oneself into a state of guilt, and that one cannot get oneself out of a state of guilt, becomes progressively clearer to the one who takes seriously the need to assume full responsibility for oneself. Self-reliance leads to guilt; self-reliance can then reach its limits in the act of repentance. Whereas Judge Wilhelm thinks he can go one step further and, having fully repented himself, regain himself on the strength of his own self-responsibility, the person of resignation is content to dwell in the mode of repentance and considers any thought of going beyond repentance as mere presumption. Thus, the life of resignation retains the emphasis on self-reliance that marks the ethical way of life generally. But in resignation one acknowledges that self-reliance can lead no further than repentance and that which a life of genuine repentance entails: renunciation, suffering, and the consciousness of one's guilt. In this second manifestation of the ethical life, self-reliant resignation replaces self-reliant responsibility as one's fundamental orientation toward oneself, the world, and others.

Judge Wilhelm seems to believe that one can repent 'before God' and then simply *assume* that one is forgiven. From the standpoint of theoretical ethics, this assumption is not unreasonable. Genuine repentance, one might think, merits forgiveness. An all-good and forgiving God could be reliably counted on

[24] We do sometimes talk about 'forgiving oneself' in the psychological sense, meaning that one ceases to dwell on some past action or event. But the idea that one could commit some ethical wrongdoing and then annul the guilt of this wrongdoing by simply 'forgiving oneself' is, of course, absurd. An interesting question remains about whether the forgiveness of other people is sufficient to annul the guilt of your wrongdoings, or whether divine forgiveness is required for this. This issue will be discussed in the chapter on despair.

to forgive someone who genuinely repented; therefore, one is justified in moving from the step of repentance to the step of regaining a happy, secure place in the world.[25] As Kierkegaard might say, while this reasoning looks good on paper, when applied to life its failings become apparent. The Juttland priest's sermon points to the presumption in this leap: genuine repentance requires that we assume just the opposite, that 'before God' we are always in the wrong.

Understood from the viewpoint of Judge Wilhelm's ethics, God is nothing but a reliable forgiveness-mechanism. Understood from the viewpoint of resignation, God is a terrifying judge before whom one works out one's salvation in "fear and trembling." Interestingly, *Fear and Trembling* does not attempt to address the issue of salvation through forgiveness directly, as Johannes explains in the footnote quoted above.[26] This work mainly deals with the related issue of renouncing the world (infinite resignation) in contrast to faith, in which one gains a happy, secure place at home in the world by trusting in God. Johannes is, by his own admission, a 'knight' of resignation (*FT*:64, 66). He admits that "God's love is for me, both in a direct and inverse sense, incommensurable with the whole of reality. I am not coward enough to whimper and moan on that account, but neither am I underhanded enough to deny that faith is something far higher" (*FT*:63).[27] In the life of resignation, one understands one's highest duty to be the practice of self-denial, the renunciation of one's place in the world and, perhaps most importantly, the renunciation of one's relations with other people.

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[25] While Judge Wilhelm does not explicitly make this argument, it seems that some such reasoning is behind his leap from repentance to claiming a happy, secure existence in the world.

[26] (*FT*:124fn). At most, these topics are indirectly represented: just as Abraham's faith represents Christian faith 'in a figure', Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and God giving Isaac back again may be taken as a metaphor for repentance and divine forgiveness.

[27] This quote illustrates how well the life of resignation matches the ascetic life of "negative commitment" that Judge Wilhelm criticizes (discussed above). Both Johannes and Judge Wilhelm contrast the life of resignation with a life of joyful participation in the world, and both rank the latter above the former. Their disagreement is over how this life of joyful participation in the world can be attained. Judge Wilhelm thinks it can be attained through self-reliance whereas Johannes thinks it can only be attained by abandoning self-reliance in the mode of faith.

Johannes illustrates this way of life, and contrasts it with the life of faith, by retelling the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. His inability to come to terms with the story is expressed by the four versions of the story with in the "Attunement" at the beginning of *Fear and Trembling*. In each case, we are presented with a 'false Abraham' who reacts to the trial not with faith but out of some other existential stance. As the text progresses, Johannes also explains what he would do in Abraham's situation. As a self-professed knight of resignation, Johannes admits "The moment I mounted the horse I would have said to myself: 'Now everything is lost, God demands Isaac, I sacrifice him, and with him all my joy – yet God is love and for me continues to be so.' For in the temporal world God and I cannot talk together, we have no common language" (*FT*:64). The second and third of the four 'false Abrahams' Johannes describes in the "Attunement" also represent what Abraham might have done had he been a knight of resignation rather than a knight of faith. The second 'false Abraham' sadly but resolutely resigns himself to sacrificing Isaac as God demands. The steadfastness of his resignation means that when God provides the ram to sacrifice instead, this Abraham is unable to accept Isaac back again with joy: "From that day on, Abraham became old, he could not forget that God had demanded this of him. Isaac throve as before; but Abraham's eye was darkened, he saw joy no more" (*FT*:46). Like Judge Wilhelm in his moment of collapse, this Abraham becomes prematurely old, joyless and a stranger to his own life.

The third false Abraham understands God's test according to the ethical categories of guilt and repentance. He thinks the proper response to the test is to repent of having even considered killing Isaac: "It was a tranquil evening when Abraham rode out alone, and he rode to the mountain in Moriah: he threw himself on his face, he begged God to forgive his sin at having been willing to sacrifice Isaac, at the father's having forgotten his duty to his son. He rode more frequently on his lonely way, but found no peace" (*FT*:47). In contrast to the real Abraham, whose faith entails trusting absolutely in God, these false Abrahams trust in their own capacities for renunciation and repentance.

Further explanation of the life of resignation in contrast to the life of faith is found in the work of Johannes Climacus, particularly in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to his earlier work, *Philosophical Fragments*. In the *Postscript* Climacus gives a careful analysis of three essential features of the life of resignation: renunciation of all relative ends and the world ("dying to immediacy"), suffering, and the consciousness of guilt.

Climacus resolutely disagrees with Judge Wilhelm's suggestion that the ethical person "can save his own soul and win the whole world" (*EO II*:178). Adopting a more traditional penitential stance, Climacus believes that saving one's soul (which he calls "eternal happiness") requires losing the world. According to Climacus, the highest *telos* of one's life ought to be the absolute *telos*: one's eternal happiness, or (what he takes as equivalent) one's relationship to God. Climacus thinks that most people live for some relative end (e.g. status, wealth, comfort, pleasure) or perhaps for a series of relative ends. He notes that some people *also* recognize the value of one's relation to God and one's eternal happiness, but this "also" is precisely what indicates their failure to relate to this absolute *telos* absolutely. Climacus believes that to merely include one's eternal happiness in a list of other concerns is to treat it as something with relative, rather than absolute, importance. Climacus seems to have Judge Wilhelm in mind when he declares: "I do not know whether one should laugh or weep on hearing the enumeration: a good job, a beautiful wife, health, the rank of councilor of justice – and in addition an eternal happiness" (*PS*:391). By merely *including* the absolute *telos* among one's highest ends, one in fact treats it as relative and excludes it as the absolute. Climacus believes we should relate to every relative *telos* relatively and the absolute *telos* absolutely. But relating to this absolute *telos* absolutely requires being willing to renounce every relative *telos* in life: "Now, if to him an eternal happiness is the highest good, this means that in his acting the finite elements are once and for all reduced to what must be surrendered in relation to eternal happiness" (*PS*:391).

The reason why relating absolutely to the absolute *telos* requires renunciation of all relative ends is because from the viewpoint of resignation what is absolute and godly is mutually exclusive of worldly, relative ends: "one cannot make the finite commensurate with it" (*PS*:484). From the perspective of this way of life, one must give up the world in order to cling to God. Climacus calls this renunciation "dying to immediacy": "The effect that a person's conception of God or of his eternal happiness should have is that it transforms his entire existence in relation to it, a transformation that is a dying to immediacy. [...]This is the cessation of immediacy and the death warrant of annihilation" (*PS*:483).

Climacus recognizes that this stance of renunciation has been historically manifested in the monastic life. While he applauds the devotion and renunciation of this life, he finds fault with it on the grounds that the 'monastic movement' seeks to outwardly express the inward relation of religiousness: "the Middle Ages wanted a little cubbyhole in order to be able to occupy itself with the absolute; but it was precisely by this that the absolute was lost, because it still became something outward" (*PS*:408). In contrast, Climacus thinks the proper life of resignation involves remaining within the everyday world while becoming inwardly detached from it: "all the passions of finitude must be dead" (*PS*:472). The man of resignation becomes dead to the world and a stranger to his own life, but he remains within it: "He lives in the finite, but he does not have his life in it. His life, like the life of another, has the diverse predicates of a human existence, but he is within them like a person who walks in the a stranger's borrowed clothes. He is a stranger in the world of finitude" (*PS*:410).

As a way of life, resignation involves renouncing not only the world, but oneself and others as well. As Climacus declares, "self-annihilation is the essential form for the relationship with God." (*PS*:460) In addition to renouncing all of one's relative ends and becoming a stranger to one's own everyday life, this self-annihilation requires the "strenuous consciousness that [one] is capable of nothing" (*PS*:430). Whereas Judge Wilhelm sought to *achieve*

ethical goodness, and thereby achieve serenity and happiness, Climacus explains that "the task is to comprehend that a person is nothing at all before God or to be nothing at all and thereby to be before God, and he continually insists upon having this incapacity before him, and its disappearance is the disappearance of religiousness" (*PS:*460).

Becoming dead to the world and detached from one's everyday affairs obviously entails giving up substantial relations with others. Citing the example of marriage, Judge Wilhelm maintained that a happy, close relationship with others could be attained through ethical commitment. In contrast, the life of resignation isolates each individual and treats relationships between individuals as insignificant. Thus, Climacus' understanding of marriage is that, as a relationship between two individuals in the world, it is merely a joke. He thinks the earnestness of marriage stems from the fact that both partners are separately relating to God. The marriage relationship between these two particular, existing individuals, husband and wife, has no significance in itself: "Marriage is still a jest, a jest that must be treated with all earnestness, except that earnestness does not therefore inhere in marriage itself but is a reflection of the earnestness of the relationship with God, a reflection of the husband's absolute relation to his absolute telos and of the wife's absolute relation to her absolute telos" (*PS*:456).

Another central feature of the life of resignation is suffering. Climacus believes that suffering necessarily results from trying to live a life devoted to the absolute telos while remaining in the finite world: "the absoluteness of the religious placed together with the specific, a combination that in existence is the very basis and meaning of suffering" (*PS*:483). The person of religiousness A suffers because he estranges himself from, yet remains within, the finite world. To use Climacus' metaphor, he is like a fish out of water: "just like the fish (which undauntedly cuts through the water and unerringly steers between the enchanted regions in the shoals) when it is lying on the ground outside its element, so too, the religious person is captive, because absoluteness is not directly the element of a finite existence" (*PS*:483).

Climacus therefore holds suffering as *essential* to the life of resignation. In contrast, suffering is seen as a merely accidental part of life for the aesthete and for Judge Wilhelm. For the aesthete, suffering (whether immediate pain, or reflective boredom) is precisely what one strives to avoid. For Judge Wilhelm whether one suffers or not is merely accidental: the person who chooses himself takes responsibility for himself despite suffering, or rather he takes responsibility for how his suffering, or lack of it, manifests itself in his actions. In contrast to both the aesthete avoidance of pain, and the ethical attempt to make pain insignificant, the life of resignation *welcomes* pain as a sign that life is oriented against the world and toward God: "the religious person continually has suffering with him, wants suffering in the same sense as the immediate person wants good fortune, and wants and has suffering even if the misfortune is not present externally" (*PS*:433-4).

Thus, what is fatal for the aesthetic way of life proves essential for the life of resignation: "Immediacy expires in misfortune; in suffering the religious begins to breathe" (*PS*:436). This is in part because for the man of resignation, suffering is edifying and uplifting. (Suffering further strengthens his resolve and his willingness to renounce the world and others. It also gives him further cause to seek self-annihilation. So in a sense, the man of resignation becomes stronger through his resignation.) But Climacus is careful to distinguish this idea from the worldly wisdom which claims that suffering makes us stronger or more capable in a wordly sense: "Aesthetic maundering, worldly wisdom or worldly sagacity wants to let suffering have its significance in a finite teleology; through adversities a human being is trained to become something in the finite"(*PS*:451). For Climacus, suffering has its significance in that it is a sign that one lives a life of resignation and because it strengthens this will to renounce the world, not because it allows one to achieve strength or some finite ends within the world.[28]

[28] Climacus is opposed to the notion of suffering as potentially valuable in the way that Nietzsche suggests, e.g. in his famous dictum "whatever does not kill me makes me stronger," (*TI*: "Maxims" 8), a claim that I will discuss further in Chapter 4.

Likewise, suffering does not have its significance as the (finite) achievement of a monastic self-severity and self-torture: "Suffering as dying to immediacy is, therefore, not flagellation and other such things; it is not self-torment. In other words, the self-tormentor by no means expresses that he is capable of nothing before God, because he considers self-torment to be indeed something" (*PS*:463).[29]

The final aspect of the life of resignation Climacus presents is the consciousness of guilt. We have already discussed the problem of guilt (that every individual is guilty of at least some past wrongdoing) and we have seen how Judge Wilhelm failed to adequately address this problem. Climacus intensifies this problem of guilt by explaining that any particular wrongdoing leads to total and absolute guilt, and that this guilt then defines one's relation to God. He begins by making the distinction between quantitative and qualitative conceptions of guilt. According to the former, one person or action may be more guilty than another person or action; according to the latter, any amount of guilt whatsoever imparts the quality 'guilt' indelibly upon the individual. Climacus believes that when considered 'before God' and in relation to our prospects of eternal happiness, one's guilt cannot be understood comparatively and quantitatively. Rather, one must accept one's guilt as an absolute quality of who one is as a person. If a person is at all guilty, he is totally guilty:

> The totality of guilt comes into existence for the individual by joining his guilt, be it just one, be it utterly trivial, together with the relation to an eternal happiness. That was why we began by saying that the consciousness of guilt is the decisive expression for the relation to an eternal happiness. ...The slightest guilt, even if the individual henceforth were an angel, when joined together with the relation to an eternal happiness is sufficient, because the joining together yields the qualitative category. (*PS*:529).

[29] Nietzsche makes a similar point in saying that "He who despises himself still nonetheless respects himself as one who despises" (*BGE*:78).

Because one's 'eternal happiness' is jeopardized by even one guilty act, when the discovery of any amount of guilt is understood in relation to one's eternal happiness[30], the conclusion is that one is guilty *as a whole person* (i.e. qualitatively) and not simply 'a little guilty' for this one act of wrongdoing. While we commonly talk about guilt in comparative and quantitative terms, Climacus points out that to avoid the totality and absoluteness of one's own particular guilt by hiding behind such comparisons is itself unethical :

> Comparatively, relatively, before a human court, perceived in memory (instead of in the recollection of eternity), one guilt (collectively understood) is not at all adequate for this; neither is the sum of all of them. The snag, however, is that it is simply unethical to have one's life in the comparative, the relative, in the external, and to have the police court, the conciliation court, a newspaper, or some of Copenhagen's dignitaries, or the urban rabble, be the highest court with regard to oneself. (*PS*:530)

As Climacus points out, one only grows more and more guilty the more one denies or avoids one's guilt. Using the metaphor of interest on a debt that is continually compounded, thereby adding usuriously to the principle, Climacus says that for one who fails to properly address his guilt from the beginning, guilt only becomes continually greater: "from that moment the total guilt, which is decisive, practices usury with new guilt" (*PS*:526). Anyone who protests his innocence also betrays an avoidance of guilt, since Climacus believes each person is guilty of at least some wrongdoing; this protest of innocence then becomes just one more thing of which one is guilty. This phenomenon is what we might call the 'guilt trap', in reference to Climacus' observation that "if it is true of any category, it is true of guilt: it traps [*fange*]. Its dialectic is so cunning that the

[30] There is a lot of controversy over what Climacus means by "eternal happiness" or "eternal blessedness," but many scholars insist that he is not referring to an afterlife. One's eternal state of being is something 'out of time' and thus something that exists not just after one dies but now, in 'this' life. I think perhaps the best way to understand this phrase is as naming something like 'who you really are as a person.' Kierkegaard's point seems to be that if you are guilty at all, then you are guilty as a whole person, and that attempts to see your guilt in comparative terms only plunge one further into guilt by attempting to avoid one's guilt.

person who totally exonerates himself simply denounces himself, and the person who partially exonerates himself denounced himself totally" (*PS*:529).

Instead of avoiding our guilt through comparisons with other people, we should consider our guilt in relation to ourselves alone, and this means considering our guilt absolutely. Climacus acknowledges the temptation to excuse ourselves of guilt, but maintains that such excuses have no place in the highest life: "In the agreement of silence with the ideal, a word is lacking that is not missed, because what it designates does not exist, either – it is the word 'excuse'" (*PS*:549). He also considers as childish the desire to make guilt go away. This hope follows from the childish and aesthetic conception of guilt, that "the individual is without guilt, then guilt and guiltlessness come along as alternating categories in life; at times the individual is guilty of this or that and at times not guilty" (*PS*:537). One can neither hide in the comparative view that all people are guilty and therefore one's own guilt is not so special, nor can one escape in the hope that one will somehow become ethically good again:

> Therefore this is not a childish matter of beginning all over again, of being a good child again, but neither is it a matter of universal indulgence, that all people are like that. As I have said, just one guilt – then with this the existing person who relates himself to an eternal happiness is forever imprisoned (*PS*:533).

Climacus also distinguishes his notion of a life of repentance for one's total guilt from any attempt at rectification through self-inflicted penance. The problem with self-inflicted penance is that it assumes that through penance one's guilt can be erased. This treats one's guilt as something finite and as equivalent to the suffering of the penance: "All self-inflicted penance is a lower satisfaction, not only because it is self-inflicted, but because even the most enthusiastic penance makes guilt finite by making it commensurable"(*PS*:542). Penance may also be practiced by doing good deeds, but here the objection is the same: one's guilt is not something equivalent and commensurable such that some amount of good deeds could be enough to annul it. Climacus finds that "it is deeply rooted

in human nature that guilt requires punishment" and remarks: "How natural, then, to think up something by oneself, a toilsome task, perhaps, even if it is dialectical in such a way that is can possibly benefit others, charity to the needy, denying oneself a wish, etc." (*PS*:549). Climacus finds this attempt at rectification "childish and beautiful" but ultimately naïve: "this is indeed analogous to self-inflicted penance, but, however well intentioned it is, it still makes guilt finite. There is in it a childlike hope and a childlike wish that everything could be all right again" (*PS*:549).

The real significance of guilt is found in the guilty individual's relation to the absolute, i.e. his relation to God and the prospect of his own eternal happiness. Climacus believes that guilt establishes a distance between oneself and God. In repentance, we acknowledge this "abyss" but also orient ourselves once again toward our eternal happiness and God: "In the eternal recollecting of guilt-consciousness, the existing person relates himself to an eternal happiness, but not in such a way that he now has come closer to it directly; on the contrary, he is now distanced from it as much as possible, but he still relates himself to it" (*PS*:535). The man of resignation insists upon his guilt and the distance it places between himself and God and himself because by steadfastly doing so, and repenting of it all, he can once again at least relate himself to God and to his eternal happiness. In other words, repentance at least orients oneself toward God even if it also acknowledges an unbridgeable gulf of guilt separating oneself from God.

This insistence on finding oneself guilty indicates that the person of resignation has not given up the goal of self-reliance. This person believes that one cannot attain goodness self-reliantly, but one can self-reliantly acknowledge one's failure to do so and repent of it. As we shall discuss in the chapter on despair, the person of resignation's insistence on his own guilt might seem like humility, but in the face of the offer of divine forgiveness, this insistence on one's guilt is in fact a form of defiance.

§ 3: THE RELIGIOUS WAY OF LIFE

In the previous section, we saw how the domain of 'the ethical' encompasses both a life lived according to Judge Wilhelm's ethics of self-responsibility and the life of resignation. Spokesmen for the life of resignation, Johannes de Silentio and Johannes Climacus, both admit that the life of resignation is inferior to another way of life, and both give us a glimpse of a way of life that is superior to either version of the ethical life. This superior alternative is the "life of faith," the religious way of life that Climacus calls "Religiousness B," "paradoxical religiousness," or simply "Christianity." The principal difference between the life of faith and Religiousness A is that Religiousness A remains entirely in the domain of self-reliant human achievement (what Climacus calls the domain of 'immanence'). The essential defining factor in 'the ethical life' (broadly conceived to include the 'ethico-religious') is the uncompromising insistence on self-reliance, whether this be the self-reliance required by Judge Wilhelm's ethics of self-responsibility or the self-reliance required for the resignation, suffering and guilt of Religiousness A. As Johannes de Silentio explains, from the ethical point of view, human existence is an "entirely self-enclosed" sphere in which "the ethical is at once the limit and completion. God becomes an invisible, vanishing point, an impotent thought, and his power is to be found only in the ethical, which fills all existence" (FT:96). By insisting on self-reliance, the ethical conception of life therefore excludes the reality of God; insisting on self-reliance also means refusing outside help, which includes the possibility of forgiveness.[31]

In contrast, the life of faith requires that we surrender this insistence on self-reliance. Living by faith means putting one's trust absolutely in God, not in one's own strengths and abilities. Moreover, by asking us to relate to a particular historical figure and by insisting that our eternal happiness depends not on our own accomplishments but on the accomplishments of this figure (i.e., the Atonement), Christianity posits conditions for the good life which are external to the individual. Self-reliance may be necessary for getting as far as Religiousness A, but self-reliance

[31] Johannes points out that this leads to a "curious comedy" since ethics includes the problem of guilt but not its solution (forgiveness) (*FT*:124).

must be abandoned if a person is to cross the threshold into the life of faith. In many ways faith simply *is* this abandonment of self-reliance. More exactly, faith is a way of living in which one relates to oneself, other people and the world through one's loving trust in God.

Contrary to the usual gloomy caricature, Kierkegaard envisioned the life of faith as one in which love of God manifests itself in loving, joyful engagement with others and the world. As Kierkegaard understands it, this life of joyful, genuine participation in the world is a stance gained only through accepting one's life as a gift and task from God. This insistence that the life of faith is a life of joy is a central message of *Fear and Trembling*, and is further worked out in later discourses such as the *Three Devotional Discourses* ('The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air'), *The Woman Who was a Sinner*, and *Three Discourses at Communion on Fridays*. In order to establish an understanding of the life of faith, I will first turn to Johannes de Silentio's *Fear and Trembling*, which provides what is probably the most concrete and expansive portrait of the life of faith in the Kierkegaard literature. In order to fill out further details of Kierkegaard's conception of the life of faith, and to justify my life-affirming reading of this conception, I will then turn briefly to the other works just mentioned.

Before proceeding, it is worth addressing what Kierkegaard means by calling the life of faith "paradoxical." Kierkegaard is famous for claiming that the domain of faith lies beyond the bounds of philosophical inquiry by declaring that faith is a "paradox": "Philosophy cannot and should not give us an account of faith, but should understand itself and know just what it has indeed to offer" (FT:63). If this is the case, one might reasonably wonder how my task in this section could ever be carried out. To address this worry, we must first realize that by "philosophy" Kierkegaard means systematic rational thought in the manner of Hegel, as the context of the previous quote makes clear. The kind of existential philosophical exploration undertaken by Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms is not able to provide a systematic explanation of faith (i.e. a rational theology), but neither does it try to do this. Instead, it attempts (and I think ultimately succeeds) in developing a basic portrait of a life of faith, specifically how faith might manifest itself in the contemporary world.

We should also realize that Kierkegaard has several notions of paradoxes in the life of faith, but none of them preclude him from sketching a workable portrait of the life of faith, as he does in several works. By paradoxes he means something which is not only beyond rational comprehension, but which rational thought will most likely condemn as a contradiction or as nonsense. For the most part these paradoxes are theological, or rather, *anti-theological* in the sense that they make impossible any attempt to understand the nature or workings of God. For example, Kierkegaard thinks the central Christian notion of an eternal God becoming a human being in time is, logically speaking, a contradiction. Likewise, he thinks there is something paradoxical in the Christian notion of forgiveness, as I will discuss later in this chapter. With respect to Abraham, Johannes thinks that it is paradoxical for Abraham to be willing to sacrifice Isaac out of faith while simultaneously having faith that God will not demand this sacrifice, or will restore Isaac. (The idea that an unchanging, omniscient God might change his mind and call off the request might itself seem paradoxical. This apparent contradiction is compounded by the fact that God has already promised Abraham that through Isaac he will be 'the father of a multitude of nations,' so his demand that Isaac be sacrificed would entail God breaking his promise, which may be another paradox.) Although Kierkegaard thinks that these aspects of the life of faith can never be rationally explained, this obviously does not stop him from pursuing what he finds more pressing than these theoretical concerns, namely drawing a portrait of how faith would manifest itself in a way of life.

Even aside from these difficulties regarding 'paradoxes', the religious way of life is by far the most difficult to describe. Perhaps the greatest success in *Fear and Trembling* is the demonstration of this difficulty through Johannes's successive failures to come to terms with the story of Abraham either poetically or dialectically. As Johannes' efforts reveal, some things about the life of faith simply cannot be explained. In particular, one can explain neither the nature of the divine being nor how a person comes to make the internal 'leap' by which she comes to have faith in this divine being. What *can* be said about the life of faith, in Johannes' account, is

something about the kind of internal orientation faith represents (i.e. one of love, trust, joy, etc.). Moreover, Johannes has much to say about the benefits of living by faith: namely, a life of loving, secure, and happy engagement with others in the everyday world. Thus, Johannes gives us a character sketch of the person of faith, not a roadmap to how one comes to have faith.

Looked at externally, the person of faith may take on a wide variety of roles and appearances. Johannes rejects the idea that a person of faith necessarily takes on set external roles, such as those of the clergy or the monastic orders. Faith does indeed manifest itself in external action; it is not mere "hidden inwardness," as Climacus suggests.[32] (As Kierkegaard claims in *Works of Love*, faith requires that we follow the example of Jesus in loving others, and for Jesus love was "pure action" (*WL*:106).) Yet such actions may be ambiguous when seen from the outside (like Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, which could appear as a sign of faith or its opposite). Hence, faith manifests itself in external action, yet there is no definitive external mark of faith. The definitive mark of faith is the internal "movement" of faith which the person makes: his orientation toward God and, thereby, toward himself, the world, and others. This internal movement lies behind whatever external acts of devotion or works of love faith requires of him.

One of the central points in *Fear and Trembling* is that faith, far from requiring world-renunciation, requires an active, joyful engagement in one's 'worldly' affairs. Johannes insists that the person of faith "minds his affairs" and "takes part, takes pleasure" in everything life in the world has to offer (*FT*:68). We have already described in broad strokes the contrast Johannes draws between resignation and faith. As Johannes explains, for the 'knight' of resignation there is an incommensurability between the world ('finitude') and his internal orientation ('infinitude'). In contrast, the knight of faith as no conflict reconciling his internal orientation with a life fully

[32] Kierkegaard later rejected the emphasis on 'hidden inwardness' as part of his campaign against the complacency and lack of 'works of love' he saw in Christendom. In his biography of Kierkegaard, Joakim Garff notes that "from having been the implacable defender of inwardness, Kierkegaard became its no less implacable prosecutor. This is why his writings can be read retrospectively as an elaborate history of the abolition of inwardness" Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, Transl. Bruce Kirmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 265.

engaged in the world, since his internal orientation directs him back to a loving, active engagement with his 'affairs' in the world: "One detects nothing of the strangeness and superiority that mark the knight of the infinite. This man takes pleasure, takes part, in everything, and whenever one catches him occupied with something his engagement has the persistence of the worldly person whose soul is wrapped up in such things" (*FT*:68). Whereas the knight of resignation remains in the finite world only as a stranger, the knight of faith is fully at home in the world. Thus, living by faith does not mean ceasing to engage in the affairs of 'this' world or engaging in them only as one who is inwardly 'dead to the world.' Faith means fully engaging in these affairs with faith as one's guide. Johannes reveals that the life of secure, happy participation in the everyday world – a life which Judge Wilhelm thought could be attained through ethical self-reliance – is in fact attainable only through faith.

How does faith in God allow for this happy, secure life? The person of faith participates in worldly affairs 'on the strength of the absurd,' meaning that he does so guided by a faith in an absolutely transcendent God who nonetheless loves and cares for him and for every seemingly insignificant moment of his life. As Johannes explains, the person of resignation steadfastly refuses to "burden God with his petty cares"; he dares not ask God for anything in this world, humbly desiring only to ''gaze upon his love" for God and to "keep its virginal flame pure and clear" (*FT*:64). In contrast, the person of faith remains "convinced that God troubles himself about the smallest things" (*FT*:64). Because he trusts absolutely in God and believes God cares for his life in this world, the knight of faith walks through life confidently, even more at home in the world than the worldly aesthete or Judge Wilhelm's devoted man of duty and self-responsibility. Through faith, one can enjoy life for the first time since this enjoyment stems from neither an aesthetic need to escape boredom, nor from the ethical person's (fraudulent) sense of security regarding his own moral merit.

Johannes provides an extended character sketch of the contemporary person of faith strolling around Copenhagen, passionately engaging in everyday affairs with a joyful and care-free confidence gained through faith: "Carefree as a devil-may-care good-for-nothing, he hasn't a worry in the world, and yet he purchases every moment

that he lives, 'redeeming the seasonable time' at the dearest price; not the least thing does he do except on the strength of the absurd" (*FT*:69). The person of faith is 'carefree' because he trusts absolutely in God. He enjoys a happy, secure place in the world not through his own achievement, but by trusting in God. Johannes continues: "His stance? Vigorous, it belongs altogether to finitude, no smartly turned-out townsman taking a stroll out to Fresberg on a Sunday afternoon treads the ground with surer foot; he belongs altogether to the world, no petit bourgeois belongs to it more" (*FT*:68).

Naturally, someone so passionately engaged in the world is also passionately engaged in relations with other people. The contemporary knight of faith is described as joyful, open and affable with others, inspiring of their trust, and loving toward his wife (*FT*:68-70). In order to learn more about the way faith manifests itself in relationships with others, we will now turn to the central representative of the life of faith in *Fear and Trembling,* Abraham. As Johannes sees it, Abraham proves his faith by being willing to sacrifice Isaac but also retaining hope that Isaac will be spared or restored to him. The life of faith's loving engagement in the world is illustrated by Abraham's love of Isaac (without which his sacrifice of Isaac would mean nothing) and, moreover, by his joyful acceptance of Isaac after God provides the ram to be sacrificed instead. As Johannes points out, viewed externally Abraham's binding of Isaac and raising the knife seems like an act of murder. That it is instead an act of love (love of God, love of Isaac, and thereby also love for the meaning of his own life) cannot be made clear externally, at least not in the decisive moment. This is why external appearances are at best an ambiguous sign of the life of faith.

For Johannes, the Abraham story shows that the person of faith relates to others not through the 'mediation' of ethical duty, but directly and with love. Regarding Abraham's relation with Isaac, Johannes says it is "but a poor expression to say that he faithfully fulfilled the father's duty to love the son" (*FT*:54). He goes on to describe Abraham's love of Isaac in such a way that "not many a father in the realm would dare maintain he loved his son thus" (*FT*:61). Externally, it may seem that Abraham is not even living up to this duty: his willingness to sacrifice Isaac seems like

an obvious breach of this duty. Nonetheless, Johannes thinks that Abraham fulfills his duty to his son not by obeying this ethical duty, but by trusting in God. This trust guides Abraham to an even more perfect expression of love for his son than those who (merely) fulfill their ethical duty.

This is one aspect of the famous and much-misunderstood "teleological suspension of the ethical." What is suspended in this suspension is not the ethical *per se*, but its teleological status as the most important concern. In Abraham's trial the ethical does not cease to press its demands, and this is one of the things that makes Abraham's situation so horrifying. But these ethical demands are suspended *as the most important telos* by the demands of faith. Johannes is clear that Abraham's faith does not give him any kind of 'moral holiday' in which the laws of ethics cease to apply to him. Rather, he remains perilously in opposition to the demands of the ethical: "now when the ethical is thus teleologically suspended, how does the single individual in whom it is suspended exist? He exists as the particular in opposition to the universal" (*FT*:90). What Johannes finds paradoxical about this situation is that somehow the demands of the ethical are fulfilled after all, although not in the way demanded by ethics: "Faith is just this paradox, that the single individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified before the latter, not as subordinate but as superior" (FT:84).

One consequence of Abraham's 'going beyond' the ethical is his inability to fully communicate with others. Johannes points out that when undergoing such a spiritual trial, the knight of faith seems to violate the ethical law, and he must therefore forgo sympathy or support from others. In such moments, he exists in "absolute isolation" (*FT*:106). A knight of faith cannot even get help or sympathy from other knights of faith (*FT*:99). In fact, the knight of faith can do nothing to communicate to others that he is being tested by God. In the longest of his three *Problemata*, Johannes explains that because Abraham puts himself outside the universal, he cannot communicate his plight in a way that would be understood by others: "Abraham is silent – but he cannot speak, therein lies the distress and anguish. For if when I speak I cannot make myself understood, I do not speak even if I keep

talking without stop day and night" (*FT*:137). The knight of faith's absolute relation to the absolute cannot be explained by reference to universal duties, nor can it be explained in the universal terms of a common language.

Despite the isolation imposed by the inability to explain matters of faith, Johannes emphasizes the person of faith's continuity with the world and love of others. The crux of Johannes' meditation on Abraham is that true faith is faith for *this* life, not a faith in some other-worldly afterlife. Likewise, although faith may involve 'hidden inwardness' it is not a *withdrawal* into inwardness as resignation is. Faith is therefore not something that sets a person apart from or opposed to the everyday world. It is a way of life in which one's internal relationship to God leads back to an external engagement with one's daily affairs. Faith simply *is* a way of relating to God such that one participates actively and lovingly in this world:

> But Abraham had faith, and had faith for *this* life. Yes, had his faith only been for a future life it would indeed have been easier to cast everything aside in order to hasten out of this world to which he did not belong. But Abraham's faith was not of that kind, if there is such, for a faith like that is not really faith but only its remotest possibility, a faith that has some inkling of its object at the very edge of the field of vision but remains separated from it by a yawning abyss in which despair plays its pranks. But it was for this life that Abraham believed, he believed he would become old in his land, honoured among his people, blessed in his kin, eternally remembered in Isaac, the dearest in his life. (*FT*:53-4)

As it will be an important point later when we compare Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it is worth emphasizing here that Kierkegaard's conception of religious faith is not a matter world-renouncing, other-worldly asceticism, as Nietzsche might expect of any form of Christianity. In fact, as other scholars have pointed out, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are in agreement in condemning the ascetic life of world- and self-renunciation.[33] In fact, for Kierkegaard, faith is understood specifically in contrast to resignation.

[33] For example, James Kellenberger's *Kierkegaard and Nietzsche* (MacMillan Press, 1997) contains an extensive argument for this point.

The example of Abraham illustrates this point nicely. Abraham is the paragon of faith because he was both able to make the movement of resignation, preparing himself earnestly for the sacrifice of Isaac as God demanded, and yet he was also able to maintain hope that through God's help he would not lose Isaac after all. This hope is certainly absurd, if only because it is absurd to think that God would demand Isaac's life and yet also spare it. It is also absurd because it is not based on any calculation of what is probable, nor is it based on Abraham's own ability to save Isaac. Abraham's entire energy was focused on obeying God by sacrificing Isaac. His hope for Isaac's survival is therefore not a hope in his own abilities, but in God's abilities. As Johannes explains, since 'for God all things are possible,' Abraham can maintain his hope in God even when all worldly wisdom tells him such hope is absurd:

> All along he had faith, he believed that God would not demand Isaac of him, while he was still willing to offer him if that was indeed what was demanded. He believed on the strength of the absurd, for there could be no question of human calculation, and it was indeed absurd that God who demanded this of him should in the next instant withdraw the demand. He climbed the mountain, even in that moment when the knife gleamed he believed – that God would not demand Isaac. Certainly he was surprised by the outcome, but by means of a double movement he had come back to his original position and therefore received Isaac more joyfully than the first time. (*FT*:65)

The "double movement" characterizing the life of faith is the movement of resignation followed by the movement of faith, in which what was renounced in the movement of resignation is nonetheless hoped for and received again with joy in the movement of faith. Therefore, for Johannes the issue of Abraham's joy in accepting Isaac back again is central to understanding the life of faith. Both the 'knight of resignation' and the 'knight of faith' are willing to sacrifice Isaac. This willingness represents an absolute obedience to God and shows that a person is earnest and strong enough to concentrate the whole of his being in the task God demands, even when this task involves destroying the meaning of his life. But faith requires an additional step, that the person who has made this movement of resignation nonetheless maintain hope that God will not demand this sacrifice. Faith requires not

only that he hope for this, but also (what is perhaps more difficult for one who has become passionately resigned) that he joyfully accept his life in the finite, everyday world with joy, as a gift and a task from God. This is represented by Abraham's being able to accept Isaac back again with joy after having resigned himself to sacrifice him. Such joyful acceptance is in keeping with the hope he had always maintained, that God would not take Isaac after all. Since his resignation was accompanied by this hope, his overall stance is in harmony with both the sacrifice of Isaac and the return of Isaac.

Thus, the person of faith has all the self-control and devotion of the knight of resignation; he is willing to sacrifice everything for the absolute *telos*. What distinguishes the knight of faith and the knight of resignation is the second 'movement' in the two-step dance of faith Johannes describes. Abraham's joy, "really heartfelt joy," in his life with Isaac, and the fact that "he needed no preparation, no time to adjust himself to finitude and its joy," signifies that he has gone beyond the movement of infinite resignation (*FT*:66). He performed this movement of resignation dutifully. (Many readings of the Abraham story consider this obedience the proof of Abraham's faith. Johannes goes beyond the traditional interpretations of Abraham by insisting that the real test of faith is not whether Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, but whether he could do so and yet also accept Isaac back with joy.) Like Abraham, the person of faith is willing to sacrifice everything for God, but he also retains hope and faith that God will not demand the sacrifice, or will somehow reverse it. Thus, the life of faith avoids the world-renunciation and self-denial that mark the life of resignation. The person of faith is willing to sacrifice everything if God demands it, but also accept his life in the world as a gift from God and as something God cares about. It is for this reason that love of a transcendent God manifests itself in loving engagement in the finite world.

The Abraham story also illustrates that faith goes beyond self-reliance of either the life of self-responsibility or the life of resignation, although the person of faith properly accepts his responsibilities in life and is willing to renounce even what is dearest to him if God demands it. Devotion to the ethical law implies, and in fact

requires self-reliance: the responsibility for fulfilling the ethical law must necessarily fall on the individual alone. Any attempt to defer this responsibility, or to deny that fulfilling the ethical law is always within one's ability, constitutes a neglect and violation of the ethical law. The ethical hero, whether he be Judge Wilhelm's stolid burgher or Johannes' knight of infinite resignation, is the paragon of self-reliance: all that he is, at least in relation to what he values the most, is his own doing. He turns to no one else for help and would regard doing so as a sign of weakness and failure.

In contrast, the person of faith has given up this belief in self-reliance; he is humble enough to admit that he needs help. As Johannes says, the person of faith is "humble enough to demand" God's help. Johannes emphasizes the humility of this stance in part because such a demand can so easily look like arrogant presumptuousness. Indeed, claiming such special attention from God, remaining "convinced that God troubles himself about the smallest thing" in your life seems like a sign of megalomania.[34] Moreover, Johannes reveals a deep danger in this "demand": throwing oneself helplessly before God and demanding his help in the name of faith appears to be testing God. Even the thought of doing so provokes dread in Johannes: "an immense anxiety seizes my soul, for what is it to test God?" (*FT*:76) Thus the absolute trust in God that is constitutive of faith can appear as fatalism and megalomania, if not also a direct affront to God.

The person of faith's "demand" for God's help only reveals itself as humble when we consider that this absolute trust in God comes not out of a hopeless fatalism or a desire to shirk one's responsibilities, but out of an absolute devotion to God which includes an obedient willingness to do whatever He demands. Abraham takes on the "terrible responsibility" invested in him by God's demand that he sacrifice Isaac while still maintaining his responsibility as a loving father. He accepts these responsibilities as absolutely his own and fulfills them both perfectly, despite the apparent conflict between them. He can do this, and thereby pass the test of faith,

[34] Alternately, we might think that this conception demeans God. Nietzsche, for example, talks about the caring God of the Gospels as a "petty deity" who "finds nothing nauseous in the most miserable small service" (GS:277).

precisely because he has both the courage and strength to do whatever God demands and the hope that God will save or restore Isaac through His own divine omnipotence.

Since "for God all things are possible," Abraham's absolute relation to God grants him access to an endless source of strength and courage which he can call upon in acting to fulfill his responsibilities. It also brings with it an inexhaustible well of hope that God will both continue to grant this strength and courage and insure that the meaning of his life is preserved, even when this God-given courage and strength are not sufficient to preserve it. Thus, the person of faith ventures far beyond what she can do by her own strength and courage or understand by her own strength of mind (i.e. far beyond what Climacus calls 'the immanent'.) In relation to this point, one might say that a person of faith is continually making the movement of resignation at least in the sense that he is continually renouncing hope in his own abilities to gain happiness or security in a life engaged in the world. He renounces his "claim" on the world. But for the person of faith, this resignation is a necessary prerequisite for being able to trust absolutely in God. Only by giving up his own insecure claim on the world is he able to fully accept his life in the world as a gift and task from God. The result is an even more secure (and thereby, joyful) engagement with the world than that found in other ways of life.[35] Johannes de Silentio explains that only by continually making the movement of resignation and the movement of faith can one live a life fully, joyfully and securely engaged in the finite world:

> this man has made and is at every moment making the movement of infinity. He drains in infinite resignation the deep sorrow of existence, he knows the bliss of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, whatever is most precious in the world, and yet to him finitude tastes just as good as to one who has never known anything higher, for his remaining in the finite bore no trace of a stunted, anxious training, and still he has this sense of being secure to take pleasure in it, as though it were the most certain thing of all. (*FT*:69-70)

[35] The aesthete retains only a fleeting and insecure relationship to the finitude in which he tries to lose himself. The ethical person thinks he can achieve a secure relation to the world through self-responsibility, but becomes shipwrecked on the problem of guilt. The resigned person thinks he can genuinely address the problem of guilt through repentance and renunciation, but as we will see, this amounts to a defiant rejection of God's help.

This twofold movement of giving up the finite and then accepting it back as a gift from God is what demarcates the person of faith. It follows a familiar pattern of renunciation and return found in the religions and myths of many cultures. In many of these myths the world to which the hero returns is on one hand the same world in the sense that the basic facts of the world are not changed. On the other hand, by returning to it through the journey of his renunciation the hero's world is somehow fundamentally changed. This is also true with the hero of faith. Johannes insists, as we said earlier, that the finite world which the person regains through faith is "exactly the same finitude" that he renounced, and this is true in the sense that all the concrete facts of this person's everyday world remain as they were.[36] The movement of faith does not magically rid life of all the misfortunes or suffering which normally accompany it. Nor does the person of faith return to the life of immediacy lived by the aesthete. As Johannes explains, "faith is not the first immediacy but a later one. The first immediacy is the aesthetic [...] But faith is not the aesthetic" (*FT*:109). Because the person returns to these facts of the everyday world with the orientation of faith, the world now presents itself in a very different way:

> And yet, and yet the whole earthly form he presents is a new creation on the strength of the absurd. He resigned everything infinitely, and then took everything back on the strength of the absurd. He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he makes it with such accuracy and poise that he is continually getting finitude out of it, and not for a second would one suspect anything else. (*FT*:70)

The life of faith attains a unity between the sacred and the mundane, the religious and the everyday. Johannes expresses this by saying that to make the 'movement' of faith is "to transform the leap in life to a gait, to express the sublime in the pedestrian absolutely – that is something only the knight of faith can do – and it is the one and only marvel" (*FT*:70). How it is that a person can

[36] Here we have the religious version of Kierkegaard's notion of repetition: what is sacrificed is regained in full. As discussed in the introduction, it is interesting to compare this notion of repetition with Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence.

regain finitude after renouncing it and thereby "express the sublime in the pedestrian absolutely" is not only a marvel for Johannes: it is a mystery and a paradox.

This explains the life of faith's existential stance toward the world, but what exactly is faith's existential stance toward oneself? We have already discussed how the person of faith relates to his own life as a gift and task from God. *Fear and Trembling* also contains an important discussion of the peculiar form of egoism found in the life of faith. As we have said, the person of faith is motivated by an absolute devotion to God; his absolute relation to the absolute is his highest *telos*. Although he may fulfill the ethical law, doing so is not his highest *telos* and he does so in a very different way than the ethical person. The person for whom ethical status is the highest *telos* relates to God either abstractly, as synonymous with 'duty', or indirectly as the creator and enforcer of the ethical law. This person relates to himself as an instantiation of a universal "human." In contrast to the superficial egoism of the aesthete, the ethical person prides himself on a life of altruism and respect for duty. Fulfilling the demands of the ethical means embracing some form of self-denial, whether this means the 'abrogation' of the particular self when it conflicts with the law or the complete renunciation of the world through infinite resignation. Undoubtedly there is also an element of self-denial in the absolute devotion of faith, but Johannes explains that this devotion to a personal relationship with God, a relationship whose claim is based on one's particular life, also represents a form of egoism. Abraham's actions contain "the expression of extreme egoism (doing this dreadful deed for his own sake) and on the other the expression of the most absolute devotion (doing it for God's sake)" (*FT*:99). Johannes insists on the unity of these two motivations:

> Then why does Abraham do it? For God's sake, and what is exactly the same, for his own. He does it for the sake of God because God demands this proof of his faith; he does it for his own sake in order to be able to produce the proof. The unity here is quite properly expressed in the saying in which this relationship has always been described: it is a trial, a temptation. (*FT*:88)

As Johannes suggests, the key to understanding the unity of Abraham's extreme egoism and his absolute devotion to God lies in the particular nature of Abraham's trial. Usually in such a trial the temptation is to stray from the ethical, whereas in Abraham's case it is precisely the ethical which is the temptation. Had Abraham clung to the demands of the ethical as the highest *telos*, he would not be the father of faith, as the third of the four 'false Abrahams' illustrates. Instead, Abraham clings to God and thereby passes the test.

Before leaving *Fear and Trembling*, one further point merits discussion. It might seem that Johannes de Silentio presents two conflicting portraits of the person of faith: on one hand there is Copenhagen's blithe wanderer and on the other hand there is Abraham journeying to Mt. Moriah in fear and trembling. How can these two very different images of faith be reconciled?

The first point to realize is that the knight of faith strolling around Copenhagen is not the superficial aesthete or *bourgeois* philistine he may appear to be. True, his life is joyful and carefree, but he attains this joy and security not through aesthetic hedonism but through faith, and this requires the preliminary movement of resignation. As quoted above, this seemingly carefree man of leisure "has made and is at every moment making the movement of infinity. He drains in infinite resignation the deep sorrow of existence...he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, whatever is most precious in the world" (*FT*:69). The wonder of faith is that one can be continually making this movement of resignation and yet, through making the additional movement of faith, live happily and at home in the world.

Perhaps a more important point to realize is that the test of Abraham's faith on Mt. Moriah is not the only occasion in which he has faith: it tests whether he has lived by faith all along. Abraham is not 'the father of faith' because he had faith in a moment of crisis, but because he always lived by faith. Thus although *Fear and Trembling* focuses on the story of Abraham's trial, Johannes also mentions other moments in Abraham's life when his faith becomes especially apparent: "It was by his faith that Abraham could leave the land of his fathers to become a stranger in the land

of promise"(*FT*:50), "It was faith that made Abraham accept the promise that all nations of the earth should be blessed in his seed" (*FT*:51), "the wonder of faith lies in Abraham and Sarah's being young enough to wish, and in faith's having preserved the wish" (*FT*:52), "He accepted the fulfillment of the promise, he accepted it in faith, and it happened according to expectation and according to faith" (*FT*:52).

What his 'trial' at Mt. Moriah tests, even as it asks him to give up the meaning of this life in the world, is whether he lives in the world by faith or by adherence to ethical duty. Generally speaking, the demands of ethics and the demands of faith may be perfectly aligned, and to all external appearances the person of faith may simply be following the ethical law. Abraham's relationship to God usually manifests itself in what Johannes calls "the ethical life": the fulfillment of his duties to his family and the society or state that he has founded through Isaac. But for this very reason, it is not immediately apparent whether Abraham lives by faith or by adherence to 'the universal'. The juxtaposition of the demands of faith and the demands of the ethical in a trial such as Abraham's offers a way of distinguishing one who lives by faith from one who lives by adherence to ethical duty. The faith that Abraham manifests in passing God's test is the faith that he lives by all along. When Johannes describes how Abraham has "faith for this life" it is clear that this faith is something that Abraham lives by every moment of his life. It is his way of living everyday life in the world. Thus Johannes ends *Fear and Trembling* by explaining that the person who attains faith does not come to a 'standstill' thereafter but continues to live by his love of God, insisting: "'I'm by no means standing still in my love, for I have my life in it.' (*FT*:146).

As mentioned above, the portrait of the life of faith that we get from *Fear and Trembling* is not sufficient unto itself. In order to fill out further details of the life of faith, we turn first to the only author in Kierkegaard's stable (including the venerable 'Magister Kierkegaard') who writes from the point of view of this highest way of life: Anti-Climacus. He is the pseudonymous author of *The Sickness Unto Death* which establishes an understanding of faith in the context of the development of the self, the dialectics of which were so central to our discussion of the aesthetic and ethical ways of life. We have already discussed how the life of faith entails relating to oneself and

one's life as a gift and a task from God. Anti-Climacus centers *The Sickness Unto Death* around the question of how one should properly relate to oneself. The conclusion he reaches is that only faith constitutes a proper relation to oneself (namely by relating to oneself as something 'established' by God) and therefore only faith is consistent with true selfhood. As Anti-Climacus explains, a human self is not a self-enclosed entity. The human self is a relation to itself which includes a relation to "the power which established it," i.e., God (*SUD*:44). Anti-Climacus begins the work by defining the human self as "a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself" and as a "synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity" (*SUD*:43). Although these definitions are largely correct, they are not complete: "Looked at in this way a human being is not yet a self" (*SUD*:43).

What is missing from these definitions is the fact that this self-relation includes a relation to God. Anti-Climacus explains that because the human self did not create itself, but was established or "derived" by something else, in relating to itself it also relates to that which established it: "Such a derived, established relation is the human self, a relation which relates to itself, and in relating to itself relates to something else" (*SUD*:43). The rest of *The Sickness Unto Death* is a penetrating analysis of different kinds of despair, understood as ways that the self can misrelate to itself and to God. The opposite of despair, the proper way to relate to oneself and God, is faith.

Anti-Climacus concludes the work by showing that attaining true selfhood and having faith are one and the same. Thus he gives "the formula for that state in which there is no despair at all: in relating to itself and in wanting to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power which established it. Which formula in turn, as has been remarked, is the definition of faith" (*SUD*:165). Note that this non-despairing self must be grounded "transparently" in the power that established it. We might assume that since the self has been established by God, it is always in a

sense grounded in God. But a proper relation to oneself must include a conscious awareness of this relation to God.[37]

Thus, one way of describing the despair of other ways of life is that they each involve a particular way of misrelating to oneself and to God. The aesthete would like to ignore his relation to God and the responsibility this might entail, preferring to lose himself in pleasure instead. The ethical person in Judge Wilhelm's model treats God as a purely theoretical entity, as something either synonymous with duty or as a reliable forgiveness mechanism. The person of resignation relates to God through repentance, insisting that his guilt puts an infinite distance between himself and God. In contrast to all of these, the life of faith humbly abandons pretensions of self-reliance and accepts both God's forgiveness and life in the world as a gift and task from God.

For Kierkegaard, faith solves the problem of guilt that shipwrecked the ethical way of life. Forgiveness means that the demands of the ethical are fulfilled in a way other than what ethics demanded. Ethics demands that the agent *achieve* ethical goodness by the strength of the agent's own self-reliant willpower. Forgiveness somehow restores the agent's ethical status, 'washing away his sins,' although not as a matter of the agent's own achievement. How forgiveness is able to do this is one of the things that makes it paradoxical. Faith entails a new relation to one's self, including one's responsibility and guilt. Repentance remains a part of the life of faith, but it is displaced from the center of one's relation to one's responsibility and guilt. Instead, the fundamental stance toward one's guilt is one of gratitude for forgiveness and joy in the forgiven life (WA, 157). As Kierkegaard knew personally, often this message of joy and gratitude, the 'good news' of the gospels, is one that is hardest to accept. As we will discuss at length in the chapter on despair, resistance to this acceptance constitutes one of the most intense forms of despair. (The life of resignation and religiousness A is one in which this message is demonically avoided.) But as Kierkegaard concluded to himself in his journals, the one who "doubts whether

[37] Anti-Climacus states from the beginning that the human self is "spirit," and later equates spirit with consciousness, arguing that the devil's despair is the most intense since "the devil is pure spirit and to that extent absolute consciousness and transparency " (*SUD*:72).

his sins also are forgiven, he will surely find comfort in hearing, as it were, Christ say to him: Just believe it; I have laid down my life in order to gain for you the forgiveness of your sins; so just believe it, a stronger assurance is impossible" (WA:159).

Accepting this forgiveness, the person of faith happily accepts his life in the world as a gift and task from God and he sets to work fulfilling whatever responsibilities this entails. Importantly, this entails a stance of joy towards one's everyday existence. This point is expressed nicely in *Practice in Christianity*:

> each individual in quiet inwardness before God is to humble himself under what it means in the strictest sense to be a Christian, is to confess honestly before God where he is so that he still might worthily accept the grace that is offered to every imperfect person – that is, to everyone. And then nothing further; then, as for the rest, let him do his work and rejoice in it, love his wife and rejoice in her, joyfully bring up his children, love his fellow beings, rejoice in life. (*PC*:67)

This life of humble devotion, love and joy is perhaps best illustrated in the three *Devotional Discourses* Kierkegaard began writing in the spring of 1848. At times Kierkegaard was aware that he was himself guilty of rejecting God's forgiveness; the melancholy and self-reproach inherited from his father made this a very difficult task indeed. Like the two Johanneses, Kierkegaard could make the 'movement' of resignation and repentance, but he stumbled on faith's requirement of openness and acceptance. During Holy Week in 1848, Kierkegaard had a religious experience (what he called a 'metamorphosis') in which he was moved with "the instantaneous apprehension that God had forgotten his sins – as well as forgiven them" (*GD*: xi). A journal entry dated the Wednesday of Holy Week, April 19th, expresses the magnitude of this revelation: "My whole being has changed. My concealment and reserve are broken – I must speak out" (*Journals*: VIII A640). He once again entertained hope of being saved from his melancholy. For Kierkegaard at this time, this meant accepting a position in the church: "Now I shall with God's help become my self, I now have faith that Christ will help me overcome my melancholy, and that I will become a minister" (*Journals*:VIII A641).

It was in this spirit that Kierkegaard began work on his Devotional Discourses on what we can learn from "the lilies of the field and the birds of the air," namely to live a life of silence, obedience and joy (*GD*:xvi)[38]. The scriptural text upon which these discourses are based exhorts us not to worry but to trust in God, who cares even for the lilies and the birds and who cares even more for us: "Be not therefore anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself" (*GD*:317).

The "silence" learned from the lilies and the birds is the inward quietness and stillness in which one can be free from the busyness, distraction and noise of life amidst 'the crowd.' It is only in silence that one can pause and *listen*. Hence, silence is the only mode of being in which the individual can come to be '*before God*': "out there with the lilies and the birds thou dost sense that *thou are before God*, a fact which is generally so entirely forgotten in speech and conversation with other men" (*GD*:328). The silence of nature, which remains unbroken "not only when everything holds its peace in the silent night, but also when day is vibrating with a thousand notes and all is like a sea of sound," expresses a deep reverence before God: "It expresses reverence before God, that it is He who disposes, and He alone, to whom belongeth wisdom and understanding. And just because this silence is reverence before God, it is (so far as it can be in nature) worship" (*GD*:324, 328). In silent reverence a person learns to defer to God's wisdom and understanding, to trust in God rather than in his own wisdom and efforts.

This is the renunciation of self-reliance discussed earlier; faith requires us to recognize that we can do nothing to secure our own happiness or salvation. It follows that faith itself does not begin with some action or accomplishment on behalf of the faithful: "then in a certain sense it is nothing I shall do. Yes, certainly, in a certain sense it is nothing; thou shalt in the deepest sense make thyself nothing, become nothing before God, learn to keep silent" (*GD*:322). Kierkegaard explains that even worship and prayer are not primarily a matter of saying or doing something, but of

[38] In this section, I will use Lowrie's more poetic translation rather than the Hong version, since for Kierkegaard it is important that these discourses be poetic in the sense that they are meant to elucidate faith 'in a figure' (the lilies and the birds, the woman who was a sinner, etc.) rather than directly, which would be fruitless, given Kierkegaard's own understanding of faith.

silently waiting to hear what God demands of us: "to pray is not merely to be silent but to hear. And so it is; to pray is not to hear oneself speak, but it is to be silent, and to remain silent, to wait, until the man who prays hears God" (*GD*:323).

Yet faith requires us 'to do nothing' only in the first instance. In silence one comes to hear God, but to listen to God with reverence means to *obey* whatever it is that God commands. Silence is therefore "the first prerequisite for being able truly to obey" (*GD*:336). This is true not only because silence allows us to hear God's command, but also because in silence one apprehends the "thou" in the "thou shalt" of God's command:

> thou dost apprehend that it is 'thou,' thou who shalt love God, thou, thou alone in the whole world, thou who art alone in the environment of solemn silence, so alone that every doubt, and every objection, and every excuse, and every evasion, and every question, in short, every voice, is reduced to silence in thine own inward man, every voice, that is to say, every other voice but God's, which about thee and within thee talks to thee by means of the silence (*GD*:336).

A person earnestly gathers himself together 'before God' by reducing to silence the noise of the crowd and all the anxious worries, doubts and evasions within himself. In this state he finds himself faced with an absolute 'either/or': 'either love God/ – or hate Him', 'either hold to Him/– or despise him' (*GD*:333,4). Kierkegaard uses the metaphor of erotic love to illustrate why the terms of this either/or must be so extreme, with no possibility of an intermediate position: with mere acquaintances other possibilities exist (indifference, a slight affection or aversion, etc.), but between lovers "the rule holds good: either we hold to one another/or despise one another" (*GD*:334). Yet unlike erotic love, loving and holding to God requires absolute obedience: "What then does this either/or signify? what does God demand? For either/or is a demand […] He demands obedience, unconditional obedience" (*GD*:335). The lilies and birds, as well as all of nature, serve as illustrations of absolute obedience: in the natural development of creatures and the lawlike constancy of physical bodies Kierkegaard finds the principle of obedience to God: "His will is the only will" (*GD*:337). Kierkegaard employs the same notion of natural flourishing

found in Aristotle's ethics (the lily "became actually its whole possibility"), to argue that human beings can likewise 'flourish' only through an absolute obedience to God, since the realizing of natural potential is an obedience to the Creator's will (*GD*:340).

Kierkegaard entertains the objection that the absolute obedience he sees in nature is merely the result of the fact that plants, animals and natural bodies have no choice but to "obey" the laws of nature, whereas man supposedly has the free choice to obey or disobey God. Kierkegaard does not deny the limits of his metaphor, since strictly speaking the notion of being obedient or defiant 'before God' only arises for beings who have free choice (or, in his language, are 'spirit'). He points out that in the human capacity to choose we also find the potential for great danger, since free will can be used to choose what is wrong or contrary to God's will (*GD*:345).

Nonetheless, Kierkegaard thinks that there is a way that we can apply the notion of 'making a virtue of necessity' to beings with free will. Paraphrasing Luther's declaration at the Diet of Worms ("I cannot do otherwise, here I stand"), Kierkegaard urges us to "strive to make a virtue of necessity by submitting with absolute obedience to God's will" such that we can say, "in relation to doing God's will or submitting to it, 'I can do nothing else, I can do no otherwise'" (*GD*:341). In contemporary ethical debate Luther's proclamation is used as an example of what it means to have a strong character: although the freedom to do otherwise is exercised in the development of strong character, eventually the strength of one's character insures that one cannot do otherwise than act according to one's character and convictions. Kierkegaard seems to be suggesting something similar, although he insists the self-mastery behind this strength of character is learned only through absolute obedience to something absolute, i.e. God: "By learning to obey, one learns to rule, it is said: but still more certain it is that by being oneself obedient one can learn obedience from oneself" (*GD*:336).

It may be objected that the ethical way of life also includes (and requires) absolute obedience, especially if we concede that within an ethical way of thinking the moral law is the absolute. But there is a crucial difference between the ethical and the religious understanding of obedience, and this may be summed up in one word: love.

The ethical law presses its demand for absolute obedience coldly: it follows as a matter of principle, or (as in Kant) from logical necessity, that the ethical law demands the same absolute obedience from each person. In contrast, Kierkegaard explains that "it is precisely out of love that God requires absolute obedience" (*GD*:345). The absolute obedience that God requires is not the dispassionate 'pure' respect for duty demanded by ethics, but rather a passionate, deeply personal love for God which, because this love is *for God*, manifests itself in an absolute willingness to let 'His will be the only will'. This love fundamentally alters the nature of obedience to the law: "Therefore the Gospel asserts authority and says, Thou shalt. But at the same instant this is softened so that it might be capable of moving the hardest heart; it takes thee as it were by the hand – and does as a loving father does with his child – and says, 'Come, let us go out among the lilies and the birds.'" (*GD*:346)

Devoted silence and unconditional obedience before God lead to a life of joy. In fact, Kierkegaard explains that through silence and obedience we can become, like the lilies and the birds, "joy itself" (*GD*:348). To be joy itself implies that this notion of 'joy' does not signify a mood, nor it is synonymous with pleasure. Joy is the state of being attained in living the best way of life. Like the joy of Abraham, this is not a joy in some hereafter, but joy in and for 'this' life. So, for example, Kierkegaard discusses the joy over existence and one's own coming into existence, over being a human, and over our ability to experience the world through our senses (*GD*:350). Hence, this is a joy of gratitude to God, an overabundant gratitude for one's life in 'this' world and for the means to sustaining and enhancing this life. Suffering, sorrow, and all the vicissitudes of everyday life do not disappear, but neither do they form a barrier to a joyful life. In fact, Kierkegaard explains that a joy that is conditional upon the removal or this or that sorrow or disappointment can never be unconditional: whether this condition is fulfilled or not, the joy in question remains conditional (*GD*:348).

Yet how is it that a life of silence and obedience attains unconditional joy, even in the midst of sorrow and suffering? As Kierkegaard explains, one attains 'joy itself' because in opening oneself to God in silence and obedience, one attains a closeness and trust in God which allows one to obey the call to "'Cast all your care

upon God.'" (*GD*:352). Just as absolute obedience means giving one's own will completely over to God, trusting in God means giving one's cares completely over to God. Once again the decisive factor is love. The ethical law demands absolute obedience, but one cannot 'cast all care' upon the ethical law. At most one can adopt a Stoic position in caring only for one's moral rectitude, renouncing other cares and suffering as alien to one's 'true' self. In contrast, Kierkegaard's person of faith accepts such suffering, anxiety and sorrow as truly a part of himself, but also accepts that this self is loved by God. Accepting that God loves and cares for him does not mean that his suffering is immediately eradicated, but the anxiety and burden of struggling with this suffering and sorrow is now cast upon God. Just as *Fear and Trembling* presented faith as a conviction, albeit absurd and seemingly pretentious, that "God troubles himself about the smallest things," likewise faith is here presented as the willingness to trust in God's love for you, a willingness "adoringly to dare to believe that 'God careth for thee'" (*GD*:353).

In order to understand more clearly Kierkegaard's notion of joy in the face of suffering and sorrow, and in order to fill out the portrait of faith as a way of life found in these discourses we now need to examine his concept of "simplicity," an idea discussed in each of the three discourses. In the discourse on silence, simplicity is the quietness of mind in which one is free from society's distracting talkativeness and one's own anxiety about the future. Both distraction and anxiety can prevent one from simply *being* in the present moment. Consumed by such worries and distractions, a person's self becomes dispersed over time and caught up in the ambitions and petty busyness of life amidst 'the crowd.' The result is that the self never comes to dwell in what Kierkegaard calls "the instant." 'The instant' for Kierkegaard means that intersection between the temporal and the eternal in which the human self, as a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, properly dwells. It is not this or that particular time, but a way of being in which one is 'on good terms with time' in the sense that one has plans for the future (and memory of the past) but one

can also be fully at home in the present.[39] He laments that it "is the misfortune in the lives of the great majority of men, that they never sense the instant, that in their lives the eternal and the temporal are merely separate things. And why? Because they could not keep silent" (*GD*:326).

As a result of the simplicity of mind acquired through silence, suffering is stripped of the anxiety and the "misapprehending sympathy of others," which Kierkegaard believes makes suffering so hard to bear. In silence, one does not become exempt from suffering, but one does become exempt from "that which makes suffering harder, the misapprehending sympathy of others, from that which makes suffering more protracted, the much talk about suffering, from that which makes suffering more than suffering, the sin of impatience and acidia" (*GD*:326). Thus, one key to living a joyful life even amidst suffering is to refrain from making suffering more than it is, either by becoming anxious about it, or by prolonging and exaggerating it in the company of others, or by allowing suffering to become a catalyst for resignation.[40] When a particular instance of suffering is taken to be the definite thing it is, it becomes a bearable part of life. In contrast, when suffering becomes a vast indefinite presence in one's life, as when it becomes prolonged or aggrandized by taking on extraneous meanings or social significance, it can quickly become unbearable. Kierkegaard explains this point with reference to the lily:

> Suffering for the lily is simply suffering, neither more nor less than suffering, is suffering as possible narrowed down and simplified and made as small as possible. Less than this, suffering cannot become, for it nevertheless is, and is what it is. But on the other hand, suffering can become endlessly greater when it is not exactly neither more nor less than it is. When suffering is neither more nor less, when it is merely that definite thing which it is, then, even though it were the greatest suffering, it is the least that it can be. But when it become indefinite, however great the

[39] Recall that Abraham, in absolute obedience to God's command, 'came neither too early nor too late' to his appointed task on Mt. Moriah. In contrast, the 'false Abrahams' either came too early (out of resignation, trying to get the task done with quickly) or too late (out of weakness, trying to delay in order to avoid the command).

[40] Kierkegaard's journals from the time he was writing these discourses reveal that he was aware that his own suffering, his melancholy and reserve, held this dreadful possibility of "becoming an occasion for sin" namely the sin and despair of resignation (*Journals*:VIII A, 645). This sin or despair of resignation will be explained more fully in Chapter 3.

> suffering really is, this indefiniteness increasing the suffering endlessly. And this indefiniteness emerges precisely with man's ambiguous advantage of being able to talk. On the other hand, the definiteness of suffering, the experience that it is neither more nor less than it is, is attained only by being able to keep silent. (*GD*:327-8)

If the simplicity gained through silence is a simplicity of mind in which suffering is accepted for what it is, the simplicity gained through obedience is a simplicity of will in which even tragic misfortune does not interfere with the constancy of one's will to obey God. The opposite of this simplicity of will is what Kierkegaard calls "the ambiguous": "if thou art absolutely obedient to God, then there is no ambiguity in thee, and if there is no ambiguity in thee, then art thou mere simplicity before God" (*GD*:344). 'The ambiguous' includes all of the relative ends which may tempt one away from an absolute devotion to the God. To have one's will tempted by these distractions, rather than keeping one's will unified in willing only obedience (i.e. willing only that 'His will is the only will') is the root of disobedience: "Where the ambiguous is, there is temptation, and there it proves only too easily the stronger. But where the ambiguous is, there also, in one way or another, is disobedience down at the bottom" (*GD*:344). Included in this notion of 'the ambiguous' would obviously be all the cares and concerns one has for oneself in daily life. As discussed above, faith requires us (or lovingly *invites* us) to 'cast' all these cares 'upon God' by trusting that absolute obedience to God is all that is required for us to live a joyful life.

Just as the simplicity of silence allows one to gain self-possession in the present time (what Kierkegaard calls 'the instant'), the simplicity of obedience allows one to gain self-possession in whatever circumstances are at hand (what he calls 'the spot'), regardless of whether these circumstances are disadvantageous or even tragic. Thus, Kierkegaard discusses being completely present to oneself in 'the spot' where one is: "Only by absolute obedience can one with absolute accuracy hit upon the 'spot' where one is to stand, and when one hits upon it absolutely one understands that it is absolutely indifferent whether the spot be a dunghill" (*GD*:339). Attaining this harmony with the circumstances at hand also entails becoming unified as a person,

becoming completely present to oneself through the unity of one's will to obey. Kierkegaard gives the example of the wild lily which blooms even in the most inhospitable environment: "in such an environment which does everything to hinder it, in such an environment to be completely oneself and to preserve one's identity, to deride the power of the environment – no, not to deride, that the lily does not do, but to be perfectly care-free in all its beauty!" (*GD*:339) Because absolute obedience to God also means an absolute trust in God, a person of faith can remain, like the lily, absolutely self-composed and care-free even in adverse circumstances: "For the lily is, in spite of the environment, itself, because it is absolutely obedient to God; and because it is absolutely obedient to God, therefore it is absolutely care-free, as only the obedient (especially under such conditions) can be" (*GD*:339). This absolute obedience also results in the courage necessary to persist in the face of tragedy and death. The faithful lily blooms even in the face of immediate destruction: "with destruction before its eyes, to have courage and faith to come into being in all its beauty – that only absolute obedience is capable of" (*GD*:340).

The discourse on joy seems to combine the ideas of being present to oneself in 'the instant' and in 'the spot' when it introduces the definition of joy as the state in which one can be present to oneself in "*being* today": "What is joy? or what is it to be joyful? It is to be present to oneself; but to be truly present to oneself is this thing of 'today', that is, this thing of *being* today, of truly *being today*" (*GD*:349). Kierkegaard once again uses the lilies and birds to illustrate this notion of joy: "therefore it is that the lilies and the birds are joy, because with silence and unconditional obedience they are entirely present to themselves in being today" (*GD*:349). Kierkegaard's concept of joy as 'being today' can perhaps be best understood in relation to the scriptural text upon which these discourses are based: "But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself" (*GD*:317). Anxiety for 'the morrow' betrays a lack of trust in God, and thereby a misrelation to oneself, one's circumstances and to time itself. The life of faith does not hedonistically ignore the future, but neither does it indulge in the distracting temptation to disperse oneself in

future needs and plans. The simplicity of being oneself in the present time and circumstances is necessary in order to stand 'before God.' Coming to stand 'before God' requires a person to gather himself together in what Kierkegaard calls 'collectedness' (*GD*:353). That means being present to oneself in the current time and circumstances, even if as one stands before God one also claims possession of the whole of one's past (in repentance and in gratitude) and the whole of one's future (in hope and in obedience.) In this state of 'collectedness' one gathers oneself together 'before God', and at the same time one divests all one's cares upon God through absolute trust and obedience (*GD*:353).

For Kierkegaard, the state of being fully oneself 'today' is contrasted with the state of being distracted and dispersed in 'the morrow.' Simplicity is what allows the state of 'collectedness' in which one can 'cast all cares upon God' (*GD*:353). It is for this reason that simplicity is the key to understanding how the life of faith is lived in joy, even amidst sorrow and adversity: "in the deepest sorrow to be unconditionally joyful, when there is such a dreadful tomorrow, nevertheless *to be* – that is, to be unconditionally joyful today – how do they comport themselves? They behave quite simply and with simplicity (as the lilies and the birds always do), and they get this tomorrow out of the way as if it were non-existent" (*GD*:352).

Hence, the lesson that we learn from the lilies and the birds is a further clarification from the lesson we learn from Abraham: to stand reverently 'before God' in openness and absolute obedience, to trust absolutely in God rather than in oneself, and to accept one's existence in this world as a gift from God (and therefore something to rejoice over) and as a task from God (for which one should obediently take responsibility). Anti-Climacus adds to this picture that obedience to Christ means overcoming, or at least acknowledging, the difficulties in relating to Christ as a particular historical figure. This includes the acknowledgment of failure (confession, 'the consciousness of sin') and the grateful acceptance of God's forgiveness. The result of this acknowledgement and acceptance is a way of living in the world which is marked by abiding love and joy even amidst suffering and adversity. More specifically, the life of faith involves a fundamental existential stance of openness and

love toward God, and through this God-relationship, toward oneself, others, the world.

CHAPTER 2 NIETZSCHE'S DIFFERENT WAYS OF LIFE

Having outlined how Kierkegaard approaches ethics (broadly construed) by comparing different ways of life, we are now in a position to see how Nietzsche might be said to adopt a similar approach to ethics. Certainly there are differences in the way Nietzsche conceives of these 'ways of life', the most obvious of which is that Nietzsche often portrays these ways of life on a broader historical and sociological scale. Nonetheless, Nietzsche presents this historical background as a way of orienting individuals in their thinking about what way of life they should live in the present. Thus, despite this difference in conception and method, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard converge with respect to their central ethical concern or project.

Nietzsche's thinking about ethics in terms ethical types (different 'types' of moralities which correspond to different 'types' of people) goes back at least as far as *Human, All Too Human*. In the section entitled "*Twofold prehistory of good and evil*" Nietzsche presents the notion of two different moralities corresponding to two different types of people. He states that there is a conception of "good and evil" that originates with members of the "ruling tribes and castes," those who can "requite," and one which originates with those who cannot "requite": "the subjected, the powerless" (*HH*:45). As we will see in the first section of this chapter, these ideas are further explained and developed in *Beyond Good & Evil* and again in the *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

Throughout this investigation we should bear in mind the purpose behind Nietzsche's presentation of these ethical types. As I suggested above, what Nietzsche's genealogical accounts of different moralities and ethical types is meant to offer his contemporary readers is a way of *thinking for themselves* about the values that they hold and the way they relate to these values. As historical socio-economic types, the masters or nobles are not possible or even desirable in the present age.[41] As *ethical* types Nietzsche's figures of both 'master' and 'slave' stand as

[41] See, for example, *TI* "Expeditions"43.

generalizations and "signposts" in relation to which a contemporary person might locate herself. Nietzsche would like us to have a conscience for the question: what kind of person am I? Since N. recognizes that many people contain a mixture of these two types, and in keeping with his call to "become who you are," the question might be better put: "what kind of person am I moving toward *becoming*?" I believe Nietzsche offers his historical ethical types as a way of orienting his readers in relation to this question and to the task to "become who you are."

In addition to his portrayal and analysis of historical ethical types (the masters and nobles, slaves and ascetics) Nietzsche's writings contain what he calls "pointers" toward present and future possibilities for a new, higher ethical type (*EH*: 'Beyond Good and Evil', 2). In the second and third parts of this chapter, I will explore Nietzsche's vision for these new and higher possibilities for humankind. In the second section I shall present the figures of the *Übermensch* of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and the "free spirit" discussed in most of Nietzsche's works as formulations of the ethical type Nietzsche hopes will emerge in the present and future. Then in the third section I will give a careful analysis of the "new philosopher" in *Beyond Good and Evil* and the "sovereign individual" and "creative spirit" in the *Genealogy* as representing Nietzsche's mature formulations of this new, higher ethical type. My analysis will reveal that these different formulations constitute Nietzsche's evolving thoughts on the same single figure, a figure that he presents using different labels but which he consistently identifies with certain core concepts such as independence, the revaluation of prevailing values, and a new kind of conscience.

§1 HISTORICAL FORMULATIONS OF DIFFERENT WAYS OF LIFE

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche proposes the task of developing a "typology" of different moralities; later, he introduces two fundamental types that have been seen in history: "master morality" and "slave morality." Similarly, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche traces the genealogy of two "modes of valuation," the "noble mode of valuation" and the "ascetic mode of valuation." The process of elucidating these ethical types will clarify what I mean by a 'way of life' in Nietzsche's philosophy. To this end, it will be necessary to examine what a

"morality" or a "mode of valuation" is in general, such that Nietzsche can compare different moralities and modes of valuation.

Nietzsche begins Part Five of his *Beyond Good and Evil*, "On the Natural History of Morals," by stating that what is needed for any eventual "science of morals" is an "assembly of material, conceptual comprehension and arrangement of a vast domain of delicate value-feelings and value-distinctions which live, grow, beget and perish - and perhaps attempts to display the more frequent and recurring forms of these living crystallizations - as preparation for a *typology* of morals" (*BGE*:186). Later, Nietzsche introduces his famous and often misunderstood typology of different moralities:

> In a tour of the many finer and coarser moralities which have ruled or still rule on earth I found certain traits regularly recurring together and bound up with one another: until at length two basic types were revealed and a basic distinction emerged. There is *master morality* and *slave morality* - I add at once that in all higher and mixed cultures attempts at mediation between the two are apparent and more frequently confusion and mutual misunderstanding between them, indeed sometimes their harsh juxtaposition - even within the same man, within *one* soul. The moral value-distinctions have arisen either among a ruling order which was pleasurably conscious of its distinction from the ruled - or among the ruled, the slaves and dependents to every degree. (*BGE*:260)

This passage already provides several clues to understanding what Nietzsche means by a "morality" generally, such that there could be a comparison of "master morality" and "slave morality." In defining a morality, Nietzsche looks to "certain traits regularly recurring together and bound up with one another." As we shall see, these "traits" tend to be formal traits (e.g. the origin, use, or place of this morality in the lives of those upholding it) rather than the specific virtues or values which may constitute the content of a morality.[42] For Nietzsche, a "morality" is not so much a set of values as it is a *way* of holding one's values: it describes the

[42] Nietzsche is not making the claim that there are basically only two sets of values or codes of conduct developed throughout all of human history, or that the highest (or lowest) strata from every society essentially uphold the same moral tenets. Rather, he has found that despite the variety of content in different moralities, they can be grouped according to certain formal traits.

motivation, constraint, and attitude toward existence out of which one formulates and upholds these values. This passage also suggests that a morality is something which may be held by a culture or society as a whole, but is more often held by a certain class within a society. A morality can also be held by a single individual. Alternately, a single individual may hold what amounts to an admixture of two different moralities, representing a "mediation" or even a "harsh juxtaposition" between them.

The most obvious formal trait distinguishing master and slave moralities is their respective origins. "Master morality" originates in the "masters," those who are powerful and form the ruling class of a society; "slave morality" originates among the "slaves," those who are ruled.[43] Nietzsche is careful to note that those who became the rulers of society at its inception did so not just through physical might: "their superiority lay, not in their physical strength, but primarily in their psychical [strength] – they were *more complete* human beings" (*BGE*:257).

It is important for Nietzsche that a "type" of morality always corresponds to a "type" of person. This is in keeping with his claim that a "human being's evaluations betray something of the structure of his soul and where it sees its conditions of life, its real needs" (*BGE*:268). It is also in keeping with his insistence that it is "immediately obvious that designations of moral value were everywhere first applied to human beings, and only later and derivatively to actions" (*BGE*:260). But what exactly is the relationship between a 'type' of morality and the 'type' of person with whom Nietzsche associates it? As Nietzsche explains in the *Genealogy*, it is a mistake to think that a person can freely "choose" one of these moralities rather than another (*GM*:I.13). One's type of morality is a direct result and expression of the type of person one is. Likewise, for Nietzsche a personal type is

[43] Nietzsche uses the term slave (*Sklaven*) not to pick out those who are *owned* by other people, but in the broader, classical sense denoting anyone among the vast lowest classes of a society. Historically 'slaves' of any society would be those who are disenfranchised, powerless, and oppressed. Ethically, those who are 'slavish' with respect to values are those who relate to their values with the attitudes which Nietzsche thinks originated with these historical 'slave' classes, e.g. resignation, resentment, and 'herd' conformity.

defined ethically, in reference this person's values and all that contribute to them[44]. In Nietzsche's thinking, we cannot imagine a disembodied 'morality'; a set of values must be understood in the context of a whole way of life in which it arises and takes hold. Thus, a 'way of life' as we shall come to understand this term can be discussed as either a 'morality' or a 'type of person'.

The difference between master and slave morality does not simply consist in the difference in social position of their adherents. More significant for defining these moralities and distinguishing between them is the evaluative orientation (toward themselves, others and the world as a whole) of those who uphold them. Nietzsche indicates that master morality is the product of a ruling order which is "pleasurably conscious of its distinction from the ruled" (*BGE*:260). He goes on to explain that the evaluative orientation of master morality is one of self-affirmation: the nobles honor themselves as "good" and their lives as worthy of living.

> The noble type of man feels *himself* to be the determiner of values, he does not need to be approved of, he judges 'what harms me is harmful in itself', he knows himself to be that which in general first accords honour to things, he *creates values*. Everything he knows to be part of himself, he honours: such a morality is self-glorification. (*BGE*:260)

Master morality originates in a "creation of values" in which the nobles establish themselves and their lives as standards of value. The concept of a "creation of values" introduced here is often misunderstood, and it requires some clarification. It might be said that the nobles "create" their own values rather than conform to values established by some moral code existing independently of them. But it is important to note that the values of the nobles are not created arbitrarily or *ex nihilo*. When Nietzsche says that the "noble type of man feels *himself* to be the determiner of values" he does not mean that the noble type is free to determine

[44] In contrast, one might classify personal 'types' according to things like occupation. Aaron Ridley mistakenly attributes this kind of classification to Nietzsche in his *Nietzsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the 'Genealogy'* (1998). Ridley discusses types such as 'The Philosopher' and 'The Artist.' He thereby overlooks the crucial distinction Nietzsche draws between those philosophers and artists still under the sway of the herd mentality and ascetic values and those philosophers and artists who are 'emancipated' from these values and are thus truly 'free spirits' in Nietzsche's ethical sense (to be discussed shortly).

whatever values he wishes. Rather, he means that the noble type feels himself to be the standard which determines what is valuable, as the rest of the passage clearly indicates. There is no arbitrariness in the determination of the nobles' values: they establish the traits they find in themselves (e.g. strength, integrity) and their fundamental stance toward life (e.g. joyful affirmation) as standards of value. They subsequently hold themselves and each other responsible for upholding these standards. Such standards may then become an ethos among the nobles, an ethos in which they recognize each other and to which they hold each other accountable. Such an ethos, whatever its specific evaluative content, is what Nietzsche calls 'noble morality' or 'master morality'.[45]

This creation of values flows from an immediate feeling of self-worth on behalf of the nobles. A sense of honor, respect, and reverence for oneself is perhaps the primary and most lasting characteristic of all nobility. Thus Nietzsche discusses the defining characteristic of what is noble today as "faith" in oneself: the "fundamental certainty which a noble soul possesses in regard to itself...*The noble soul has reverence for itself*" (*BGE*:287). For the nobles, this reverence for oneself necessarily includes a reverence for one's equals, for those who are similarly constituted. It also includes a contempt for what is harmful or antithetical to this way of life. Their creation of values involves the condemnation of all that is harmful to this way of life as "'harmful in itself,'" and (presumably) revering themselves and all that is conducive to their lives as 'good in itself.' In honoring and despising in this way, the nobles thereby assign what might be called *ethical* values for the first time: they honor themselves not just as powerful or well-positioned, but as "good." Hence Nietzsche's claim: "It is the powerful who understand how to honor, that is their art, their realm of invention" (*BGE*:260).

[45] It may seem that Nietzsche would have to draw a distinction between those original nobles who first created 'noble morality' and those later, non-value-creating nobles who merely adopt (i.e. conform to) this morality. I think this objection rests on a misunderstanding. What Nietzsche means by a 'creation of values' is not necessarily the historical origination of certain values *for the very first time*. It seems to be the fundamental stance of self-affirmation and self-reverence out of which an affirmation and reverence for this noble (i.e. *self-affirming*) morality arises.

It should also be said that the self-affirmation of the nobles does not simply celebrate their power or position in society; they do not merely gloat over their might and social rank. Master morality establishes its order of moral rank not only on the basis of a person's power or social standing, but also, and perhaps more importantly, on the basis of the "states of soul" which the nobles find among themselves: "when it is the rulers who determine the concept 'good', it is the exalted proud states of soul which are considered distinguishing and determine the order of rank" (*BGE*:260). Likewise, master morality does not condemn those who are not nobles for being powerless, but rather for having the opposite "states of soul" from those honored among the nobles:

> The noble human being separates from himself those natures in which the opposite of such exalted proud states find expression: he despises them…The cowardly, the timid, the petty, and those who think only of narrow utility are despised; as are the mistrustful with their constricted glance, those who abase themselves, the dog-like type of man who lets himself be mistreated, the fawning flatterer, above all the liar – it is a fundamental belief of all aristocrats that the common people are liars. 'We who are truthful' – thus did the nobility of ancient Greece designate themselves. (*BGE*:260)

The nobles' "creation of values" also involves labeling as "good" and "worthy" all the traits of personal excellence which the nobles find in themselves. Nietzsche explains: "The noble human being honours in himself the man of power, also the man who has power over himself, who understands how to speak and how to keep silent, who enjoys practicing severity and harshness upon himself and feels reverence for all that is severe and harsh" (*BGE*:260). The nobles honor the conditions of their existence not out of a view to "narrow utility," but out of a superabundant strength and gratitude: "In the foreground stands the feeling of plenitude, of power which seeks to overflow, the happiness of a high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would like to give away and bestow" (*BGE*:260).

In contrast, Nietzsche states that "[s]lave morality is essentially the morality of utility" (*BGE*:260). Slave morality develops not out of a feeling of plenitude and

strength, but of a desperation in which "those qualities which serve to make easier the existence of the suffering will be brought into prominence and flooded with light" (*BGE*:260). This desperation among the suffering is the origin of many of the virtues Nietzsche finds still honored in his own time: "here it is that pity, the kind and helping hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, friendliness come into honour - for here these are the most useful qualities and virtually the only means of enduring the burden of existence" (*BGE*:260).

Whereas master morality flows from an overabundant happiness and feeling of self-affirmation, slave morality is born out of desperation, a desperation that can easily lead to a pessimistic condemnation of human existence as a whole:

> Suppose the abused, oppressed, suffering, unfree, those uncertain of themselves and weary should moralize: what would their moral evaluations have in common? Probably a pessimistic mistrust of the entire situation of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man together with his situation. (*BGE*:260).

Such universal, life-denying pessimism is obviously challenged by the happiness and self-affirmation of the nobles. For this reason, the slave "would like to convince himself that happiness itself is not genuine among them" (*BGE*:260). Even more challenging to the desperate and pessimistic outlook of the slaves are the nobles' values, which establish the happiness and strength of these nobles as "good." Thus the slave "is suspicious of the virtues of the powerful: he is skeptical and mistrustful, keenly mistrustful, of everything 'good' that is honoured among them" (*BGE*:260). But the slaves are not able to simply create their own values; as we have seen, the creation of values flows from an immediate feeling of self-worth and self-reverence. According to Nietzsche, "in all strata which were in any way dependent the common man *was* only that which he *counted* as – in no way accustomed to positing values himself, he accorded himself no other value than that which his master accorded him (it is the intrinsic *right of masters* to create values)" (*BGE*:261).

What is necessary for the slaves to meet the challenge of the nobles' morality is what Nietzsche calls "*the slave revolt in morals*" (*BGE*:195). This slave revolt involves the "inversion of values" in which all that is honored by master morality becomes condemned, and all that is despised by master morality is renamed and considered a virtue. As an example, Nietzsche points to the ancient Hebrews, who in his account, "achieved that miracle of inversion of values thanks to which life on earth has for a couple of millennia acquired a new and dangerous fascination – their prophets fused 'rich', 'godless', 'evil', 'violent', 'sensual' into one and were the first to coin the word 'world' as a term of infamy" (*BGE*:195). Thus the self-affirmation at the heart of master morality is condemned by the powerless as "vanity" and the masters themselves are condemned as "evil." In fact, the notion of "evil" (rather than merely "bad" in the sense of despicable) is the primary value-concept utilized in this "slave revolt in morals." The power of the nobles and the fear they inspire insures that they will be respected (even if hated) by those without such power; the nobles cannot be despised or held in contempt. So the slaves condemn the nobles, together with their power and fearfulness, as '*evil*':

> Here is the source of the famous antithesis 'good' and '*evil*' – power and danger were felt to exist in evil, a certain dreadfulness, subtlety and strength that could not admit of contempt. Thus, according to slave morality the 'evil' inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely the 'good' who inspire fear and want to inspire it, while the 'bad' man is judged contemptible. (*BGE*:260)

The slaves invert the values of the nobles, revaluing all the noble virtues as vices. More fundamentally, slave morality represents an inversion of the nobles' evaluative orientation. Slave morality is born out of a pessimistic mistrust and condemnation of life and of those who rejoice and prosper in it. The slaves do not joyfully affirm themselves; they desperately try to preserve themselves, most of all from the powerful and happy whom they fear and resent. Slave morality begins with a vengeful condemnation of these nobles and a reactive inversion of their

values. Only then, as an afterthought, do the slaves credit themselves with being 'good' since they are unlike the nobles.[46]

To review, we have examined three formal traits which define master and slave morality and distinguish them from each other: (1) the type of person in whom they originate (those who are instinctive, powerful, and honest vs. those who are clever, impotent, and deceitful), (2) the evaluative orientation toward oneself, others and the world as a whole manifested by this type (self-reverence, mutual respect, and life-affirmation vs. a resentful condemnation of others and pessimism regarding life as a whole), and (3) the activity by which values are established (an affirming "creation of values" vs. a condemning, reactive "inversion of values"). In order to build upon our understanding of what Nietzsche means by a "morality" we will turn to the *Genealogy* in which he again takes up the task of exploring the differences between these two "moralities," now often discussed as differing "modes of valuation."[47]

In his preface to this work, Nietzsche writes that his thoughts on the origin of different moralities have hopefully become "riper, clearer, stronger, more perfect" since he first began to pursue these questions (*GM*:P2). It is not difficult to see that Nietzsche's ideas regarding noble and ascetic "modes of valuation" in the *Genealogy* represent an expansion and development of his ideas of master and slave "moralities" introduced in *Beyond Good and Evil*, written the previous year. As with Nietzsche's concept of a "morality," his concept of a "mode of valuation" can be understood primarily as a form of one's evaluative judgments and values, i.e., *how* one's values are formulated and upheld. Only secondarily does a mode of valuation, as Nietzsche presents it, include the content of these beliefs and values.

As with his analysis of master and slave morality, Nietzsche's analysis of the noble and the ascetic modes of valuation and their differences can be explained in

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[46] In taking this stand, the slaves insinuate that they *could* be like the nobles if they wanted to be, but that they refrain out of duty and virtue. They thereby cleverly imply that they have precisely what they lack: both power (the efficacy to be like the nobles if they so wished) and freedom (to choose to be like the noble or to freely refrain from doing so, thereby showing moral merit).

[47] In fact, Nietzsche often uses "mode of valuation" (*Wertungs-Weise*) and "morality"(*Moral*) interchangeably in the *Genealogy*.

terms of: (1) the type of person in whom they originate, (2) the evaluative orientation toward oneself, others and the world, which they manifest, and (3) the activity by which their respective values are established. In the *Genealogy*, even more than in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche presents these formal traits as cohering together as an interconnected whole. He also takes a closer look at how exactly these two different ways of holding values developed and how they relate to each other.

One of the most noteworthy changes in Nietzsche's thinking on the origin of morality between *Beyond Good and Evil* and the *Genealogy* is the introduction of the figure of the ascetic priest. Previously the "slave revolt in morals" was attributed to the slaves alone, but in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche suggests that this is the work of the ascetic priests, who share with the slaves an impotence in the world and the resulting feelings of brooding hatred and resentment. Unlike the slaves, these ascetic priests form the highest caste in some societies, but the relationship between the "priestly aristocracy" and the "knightly aristocracy" is left largely unclear. Nietzsche simply asserts that "One will have divined already how easily the priestly mode of valuation can branch off from the knightly-aristocratic and then develop into its opposite" adding that "this is particularly likely when the priestly caste and the warrior caste are in jealous opposition to one another and are unwilling to come to terms" (*GM* I:7).

Instead of elaborating further on the connection between these two aristocratic castes, Nietzsche proceeds to a discussion of the fundamental differences between their respective 'modes of valuation'. Whereas the knightly aristocrats distinguished themselves by their "powerful physicality" and "flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health," Nietzsche notes that "[t]here is from the first something unhealthy in such priestly aristocracies and in the habits ruling in them which turn them away from action and alternate between brooding and emotional explosions" (*GM* I:7, I:6).[48] Nietzsche finds that it is precisely their impotence that

[48] This turn away from action (and thereby involvement in worldly affairs which requires such action) is perhaps one reason Nietzsche labels these priests "ascetics"; another is their tendency to promote contempt for the natural world and emphasis on a transcendent 'beyond.'

makes these priestly aristocrats "*the most evil enemies*": "It is because of their impotence that in them hatred grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions, to the most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred" (*GM* I:7). This festering hatred, born of an inability to vent one's aggressive natural drives physically and a resentment of those who can, is what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*. As we've said, it is this impotence and poisonous hatred that the ascetic priests and the slaves have in common such that despite differences in social rank, Nietzsche thereafter groups them together as one ethical type: "the man of *ressentiment*" in contrast to the "nobles" (*GM* I:10). Likewise, Nietzsche alternately calls the values produced from this *ressentiment* "slave morality" or "the ascetic mode of valuation," or simply "the ascetic ideal." The fact that Nietzsche finds this mode of valuation shared by both the lowest classes and the "priestly aristocracy" indicates once again that his ethical types are not reducible to social or political classes, even if their origins lie in the conflicts between such classes.

Nietzsche explains that the ascetic mode of valuation begins when "*ressentiment* itself become creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge" (*GM* I:10). The priests exact a "spiritual revenge" on their enemies through a revaluation of their enemies' values. Nietzsche refers back to *Beyond Good and Evil* in citing his example of the Jews, "that priestly people,":

> who in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical revaluation of their enemies' values…It was the Jews who, with awe-inspiring consistency, dared to invert the aristocratic value-equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God)…saying "the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God… - and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity" (*GM* I:7)

According to Nietzsche, Christianity inherited this inverted value schema and it became the dominant (and eventually singular) source of Western values. By means of a mode of valuation which allowed the powerless and resentful to vent their feelings of vengeance on the happy and powerful, the ascetic priest became the "predestined savior, shepherd, and advocate of the sick herd…*Dominion over the suffering* is his kingdom" (*GM* III:15).

In contrast, the noble mode of valuation originates in a creation of values among those who are powerful and self-affirming. Nietzsche once again argues that the concept of goodness originated in the self-evaluation of those who are powerful and well-positioned in society:

> it was "the good" themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebian. It was out of this *pathos of distance* that they first seized the right to create values and to coin names for values (*GM* I:2).

In labeling themselves and their character traits as "worthy" and "good," the nobles "create values" for the first time. Originally what was affirmed was the strength, power and position in society which distinguished these "nobles" from those without power. But, as with master morality, the noble mode of valuation does not consist of these (merely) prudential or social-hierarchical values. The original aristocratic notion of goodness as power and social position deepens into what is more recognizably an *ethical* notion of goodness. Nietzsche clarifies that, as a "rule," "a concept denoting political superiority always resolves itself into a concept denoting superiority of soul" (*GM* I:6). He explains that a "*conceptual transformation*" takes place in which the ethical notion "'good' in the sense of 'with aristocratic soul,' 'noble,' 'with a soul of a higher order,' 'with a privileged soul' necessarily developed" out of the concept of "'noble,' 'aristocratic' in the social sense"(*GM* I.4). Likewise, Nietzsche notes a parallel development in which the concepts "'common,' 'plebian,' 'low,' are finally transformed into the concept 'bad'"

(*GM* I:4). Thus, the creation of values characteristic of the noble mode of valuation reaches beyond a mere (factual) recognition of social rank or physical, military or political power. Those with power and social nobility also affirmed themselves as "noble" in the ethical sense described above. They thereby created the notion of "nobility" *as an ethical value*.

So far, we have briefly sketched the origins of the noble and ascetic modes of valuation on a broad historical and sociological scale. Yet Nietzsche also gives an account of how these modes of valuation originate within the people who come to uphold them. Nietzsche believes that the nobles live according to their "regulating *unconscious* instincts" and that the noble mode of valuation springs spontaneously from an instinct and feeling of self-affirmation (*GM* I:10). In fact, living according to one's instincts is one of the recognizable marks of those "noble souls" whom this mode of valuation affirms as "good." Nietzsche cites the "enthusiastic impulsiveness in anger, love, reverence, gratitude, and revenge by which noble souls have at all times recognized one another" (*GM* I.10). He states that the noble man "lives in trust and openness with himself" and "conceives the basic concept 'good' in advance and spontaneously out of himself" (*GM* I:10, 11). This concept of 'good' arises from the immediate feelings of happiness, gratitude and self-respect which arise in the noble man and which he instinctively affirms as belonging to any "good" and "worthy" way of life.

In contrast, the powerless and resentful live by cleverness and their mode of valuation is the product of clever deception: "the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve nor honest and straightforward with himself…A race of such men of *ressentiment* is bound to become eventually cleverer than any noble race; it will honor cleverness to a far greater degree: namely, as a condition of existence of the first importance" (*GM* I:11).[49] Such cleverness is necessary for the revaluation of

[49] In discussing a noble "race" or a "race" of men of *ressentiment*, Nietzsche does not mean to pick out any particular ethnic group. That Nietzsche believes these ethical types can be found in a range of societies is confirmed in his catalogue of noble types: "the Roman, the Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, the Homeric heroes, the Scandinavian Vikings" (*GM* I:11). Most generally, Nietzsche wants to distinguish those people who have in common either a 'noble' affirmation of existence or a 'slavish' *ressentiment* toward it.

values since, as part of this process, the values of the nobles must be subtly and counter-intuitively reconceived as vices. Similarly, the impotence and suffering of the weak must be subtly and counter-intuitively reconceived as virtues. Nietzsche imaginatively portrays the "workshop" where such "*ideals are manufactured*" and describes how: "Weakness is being lied into something meritorious… and impotence which does not requite into 'goodness of heart'; anxious lowliness into 'humility'; subjection to those one hates into 'obedience'" (*GM* I:14). Likewise, those who are miserable and suffering must cleverly deceive themselves into thinking that they are happy, in contrast to the nobles: "The 'well-born' *felt* themselves to be the 'happy'; they did not have to establish their happiness artificially by examining their enemies, or to persuade themselves, *deceive* themselves, that they were happy (as all men of *ressentiment* are in the habit of doing)" (*GM* I:10).

The *Genealogy* reveals important developments in Nietzsche's thinking on the formal differences between "creation of values" by which the nobles establish their values and the inversion of these values performed by the ascetic priests. What is especially significant, in Nietzsche's view, is whether one's mode of valuation is established by an activity which is primarily active and self-affirming or one that is primarily reactive and other-denouncing. In Nietzsche's terms, the noble mode of valuation is primarily 'Yes-saying' while the ascetic mode of valuation has as its primary concept the 'No' by which it reactively condemns the nobles:

> While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside," to what is "different," what is "not itself"; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye – this *need* to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself – is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all – its action is fundamentally reaction. (*GM* I:10)

One external stimulus to which slave morality is a reaction is the presence of the powerful, joyful and much-feared nobles. The purpose of slave morality for

those who uphold it is primarily to exact a "spiritual revenge" upon these nobles by denouncing them as "evil." Slave morality thus begins with its negative concept: the notion of the nobles as an "evil enemy." Nietzsche explains that slave morality does in a sense affirm those who uphold it, but this affirmation is only a secondary afterthought: "picture 'the enemy' as the man of *ressentiment* conceives him – and here precisely is his deed, his creation: he has conceived 'the evil enemy,' '*the Evil One*,' and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a 'good one' – himself!" (*GM* I:10) In contrast, the noble mode of valuation's primary concept is affirming and self-directed, and it only subsequently develops its negative concept ('bad' in the sense of 'contemptible'). In keeping with its fundamental stance of self-affirmation, the noble mode of valuation "seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly – its negative concept 'low,' 'common,' 'bad' is only a subsequently-invented pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept" (*GM* 1:10).

As we have seen, one distinction in form between noble and ascetic modes of valuation is found in whether the activity establishing their values is primarily self-referential or primarily a reaction to others. Another distinction is found in whether these modes of valuation begin with an affirmation or a condemnation, a Yes or a No. Still another formal distinction is the way that a mode of valuation's negative concept is conceived and posited.

The negative concept of the ascetic mode of valuation is precisely the positive concept of the noble mode of valuation: "one should ask rather precisely who is 'evil' in the sense of the morality of *ressentiment*. The answer, in all strictness, is: precisely the 'good man' of the other morality, precisely the noble, powerful man" (*GM* I:11). Conceived through the 'venomous eye' of *ressentiment*, the noble way of life is understood as 'evil'. There may seem to be a self-contradiction in the way the ascetic mode of valuation establishes its negative concept, indulging in its hatred, vengefulness, and rancor against the powerful and joyful members of their society. If this were done openly, it would naturally be condemned by the ascetic values of humility, meekness, etc. For this reason, those who are powerful must be reconceived as an evil, monstrous enemy. Then the fierce opposition against the powerful can be interpreted as 'justice': "what they desire they call, not

retaliation, but 'the triumph of justice'; what they hate is not their enemy, no! they hate 'injustice,' they hate 'godlessness" (*GM* I:14). Slave morality must therefore invent the notion of "evil" and cleverly construct a caricature of the nobles as evil "monsters."

Here we see the vast difference between the noble concept of "bad" in the sense of despicable, contemptible, or unworthy and the ascetic concept of "evil". This is the difference between a negative concept born out of contempt and one born out of hatred. The nobles do not hate those who are powerless and 'tamed,' nor do they consider them "evil" monsters. Nietzsche explains that there is "indeed too much carelessness, too much taking lightly, too much looking away and impatience involved in contempt, even too much joyfulness, for it to be able to transform its object into a real caricature and monster" (*GM* I:10). He uses the example of Greek nobility to illustrate that the noble's conception of 'bad' is free from any resentment or rancor. It can even express a benevolent consideration of those who are less fortunate:

> One should not overlook the almost benevolent nuances that the Greek nobility, for example, bestows on all the words it employs to distinguish the lower orders from itself; how they are continuously mingled and sweetened with a kind of pity, consideration, and forbearance, so that finally almost all the words referring to the common man have remained as expressions signifying "unhappy," "pitiable" (*GM* I:10).

Thus, the noble mode of valuation does not caricature as "evil enemies" those whom it condemns as "bad." On the contrary, the nobles acknowledge only other nobles, those who are equally powerful and high-minded, as worthy adversaries. The nobles feel hatred and resentment neither toward those they consider 'bad' nor toward their enemies. In fact, it is a distinguishing mark of the nobles that they are free from the gnawing resentment[50] which lies at the heart of slave morality: "To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long – that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget" (*GM* I:10). Nietzsche notes, not

[50] Nietzsche remarks that "*Ressentiment* itself, if it should appear in the noble man, consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore does not poison: on the other hand, it fails to appear at all on countless occasions on which it inevitably appears in the weak and impotent" (*GM* I:10). Given that *ressentiment* is usually described as a gnawing unsatisfied hatred caused by the impotence to requite wrongs immediately, it seems that the nobles who can immediately requite wrongs do not have *ressentiment at all* in the usual sense that Nietzsche gives this term.

without some irony, that it is only among such nobles that 'love of one's enemies' may become possible:

> here alone genuine 'love of one's enemies' is possible – supposing it to be possible at all on earth. How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies! – and such reverence is a bridge to love.– For he desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and *very much* to honor!" (*GM* I:10)

Hence, the nobles relate to others, whether their friends, enemies or those for whom they have contempt, in a much different way than the men of *ressentiment*. The noble affirmations and condemnations differ not just in content, but in form, from those born out of what Nietzsche calls "the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred." The noble mode of valuation begins with an instinctive self-respect and self-affirmation by those who openly and honestly celebrate themselves and their peers as joyful, capable, and proud. This mode of valuation only subsequently formulates its negative concept 'bad' out of a contempt for those who are not similarly joyful, capable, or proud – and even then it often mingles this negative judgment with benevolent consideration and forbearance. The nobles have no need to falsify their understanding or evaluations of themselves or others, and they are free from the pessimistic weariness with life or *ressentiment* which plague the impotent and form the basis of their mode of valuation.

The preceding comparison makes it clear that a 'mode of valuation' in the *Genealogy* is a further development of the concept of a "morality' as found in *Beyond Good and Evil*. We have also shown the important unity between a 'type' of morality or mode of valuation and the 'type' of person in whom it is found. The term 'way of life' as it applies to Nietzsche's thinking indicates precisely this unity between a type of person and a type of morality or mode of valuation. In concluding this section, it will now be helpful to summarize what we've learned about what a 'way of life' is in general for Nietzsche, such that a typology comparing different ways of life could be possible.

A way of life is defined not only by what is most important and motivating for a person, but also the affects, drives, and dispositions which are fundamental to her character and life.[51] It encompasses a person's self-conception and self-evaluation, as well as her conception and evaluation of others. It constitutes the fundamental evaluative orientation toward oneself, toward others, and toward the world which manifests itself in the judgments, values, and purposes one formulates and upholds. Importantly, a way of life is not merely a way of thinking or a *theory* of values for the one who holds it. It is also the motivational basis of all of one's actions, goals, and projects. Thus, a way of life is a way of thinking, judging, and acting – a way of *being* as a person.

§2 EARLY FORMULATIONS OF NIETZSCHE NEW 'HIGHER TYPE'

Nietzsche's interest in the historical development of different moralities and ethical types is by no means purely 'academic'. His purposes are, as the subtitle to the *Genealogy* makes clear, polemic. One of his polemic aims is to alarm us about the impending crisis of values caused by the lingering predominance of ascetic ideals; Nietzsche thinks that ascetic ideals have slowly weakened and demeaned us until we have lost any reverence for ourselves. (This is the crisis of 'nihilism' to be discussed at length in chapter four). A related polemic aim is to pry us from our allegiance to ascetic and slavish values. He does this by portraying the ascetic and slavish type in a way calculated to repulse his readers, readers who are currently in the sway of such values (e.g. by portraying them as dishonest, hateful, and cowardly – contrary to the professed Christian-Platonic virtues of honesty, love and courage.) I believe Nietzsche's much-discussed 'critique of morality' can be best understood in relation to this polemic aim.

[51] Of course a way of life is never found in this merely formal sense; it is always instantiated by a particular person. Different people who share a 'way of life' generally may have very different specific goals, beliefs, affects, etc. A 'way of life' considered generally (e.g. the noble way of life) may indeed encompass the content of some values which every particular person living this way of life might be expected to uphold (e.g. courage, strength) but even then, what these terms mean may vary dramatically from individual to individual. Moreover, the explanation for *why* these particular values are shared by all who live this way of life becomes apparent only when we look at the formal aspects of this way of life (e.g. courage and strength as requirements for independence, or as manifestations of self-affirmation).

Yet Nietzsche also has the polemic aim of presenting us with an attractive "new hope," a hope for a 'higher' way of life which overcomes this crisis of nihilism. To this end, he presents his readers with enticing portraits of new ethical types. In the next two sections, I will attempt to sketch a clear portrait of the figures Nietzsche introduces as embodying a new, "higher," "more spiritual" way of life (GM I:16). As I will explain, this way of life is primarily characterized by independence, the revaluation of prevailing values, and a new kind of conscience and self-mastery.[52]

The most popularly recognized formulation of this type is perhaps the *Übermensch* mentioned in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Zarathustra says very little about the *Übermensch*, but we can discern that this figure represents the "overcoming" of mankind, the tearing down of old values and the 'creation' of new values in which meaning and value is restored to the earth and to human life (Z: Prologue). Although the nature and content of these 'new values' is left unclear, Zarathustra proclaims that any such creator will need the ability to command and obey himself (Z:"Of the Way of the Creator," "Of Self-Overcoming"). Although many scholars focus on the *Übermensch* figure as the central formulation of Nietzsche's ideal type, this approach can be dangerously misleading. As Nietzsche scholars have pointed out, there is very little textual evidence to clarify the *Übermensch* figure.[53] Additional uncertainty is introduced by the fact that the *Übermensch* is a *dramatis persona* employed by Zarathustra, who is himself a *dramatis persona* employed by Nietzsche. For these reasons, it is difficult if not impossible to substantiate claims about Nietzsche's hopes for future based on the scant *Übermensch* descriptions in *Zarathustra*. Perhaps more troublesome, it is all-too easy for scholars to read into the *Übermensch* figure whatever traits they would like to applaud or condemn in this figure. However, this danger or temptation (depending

[52] It should be said from the start that Nietzsche's descriptions of these new 'types' are far less detailed than the figures he traces historically, and perhaps for good reason. Nietzsche's task, as always, is to prompt creativity and independence in others, not to give them a blueprint for how they should live their lives. Here Nietzsche faces the same challenge that led Kierkegaard to sometimes extravagant uses of 'indirect communication': how to teach independence of thinking, acting and evaluating and then withdraw such that the teacher does not become a new obstacle to this independence.

[53] For example, see Solomon & Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said,* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000), 215.

on how you look at it) can be easily avoided since the traits that *can* be identified as belonging to the *Übermensch* are often discussed more clearly in other formulations of Nietzsche's highest ethical type.

The formulation of this 'type' that occurs most often is the 'free spirit,' a figure first introduced in *Human, All Too Human* "A Book for Free Spirits," and discussed in almost every work thereafter. The importance of this figure, and of Nietzsche's positive project of offering his readers a new ideal 'type,' is demonstrated by the fact that Nietzsche had the following words printed on the back cover of *The Gay Science*: "This book marks the conclusion of a series of writings by FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE whose common goal it is to erect a new image and ideal of the free spirit." He then listed all the works from the first volume of *Human, All Too Human* through *The Gay Science.*[54]

It may be objected that the 'free spirit' does not represent Nietzsche's *highest* hopes for the future. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he introduces the prospect of 'new philosophers' who are free spirits yet not "merely free spirits, but something more, higher, greater and thoroughly different" (*BGE*:44). All 'new philosophers' seem to be free spirits even if some free spirits lack something of what it takes to be 'new philosophers'. What these 'mere' free spirits lack compared to the new philosophers, and the exact relationship between these two figures, remains unclear. For our purposes, it will suffice to review some of the basic features of the 'free spirit' in order to understand the conceptual context for Nietzsche's later formulations of his new, higher type: the "new philosophers" of *Beyond Good and Evil*, and the "sovereign individual" and "creative spirit" of the *Genealogy*. The defining aspects of these later formulations, which can be found in at least

[54] In the later preface to *Human, All Too Human*, written eight years after the first volume, Nietzsche declares that he "*invented* once upon a time the 'free spirits,'" and that there "are no such " free spirits" nor have there been such" but that "such free spirits *will be possible* some day. . . Already I see them coming" (D, Preface, 2). It is clear that Nietzsche primarily intends the free spirit to represent an ideal for the present and future, yet he cannot resist crediting some figures from the past with free spiritedness. For example, Socrates is mentioned as a free spirit (*HH*:433). In discussing *Human, All Too Human* in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche also associates Voltaire with the free spirits, calling him a "*grandseigneur* of the spirit – like me" (*EH* "Books" *HH*: 1). Moreover, that Nietzsche saw himself as a free spirit is evident throughout his works and by his frequent epithet "*we free spirits*"(e.g. *HH*: P7, *BGE*:61, A:13).

precursory form in the 'free spirits', are: independence, the revaluation of prevailing values, and a new kind of conscience (i.e. new and different from the ascetic manifestations of conscience Nietzsche finds in the present age.)

Many early descriptions of the free spirit depict this figure as a scholar or "man of knowledge," although it is clear that Nietzsche does not want us to narrowly identify his ideal type with 'academics'. He discusses the "*refined heroism*" of those "who live for the sake of knowledge alone," who disdain to seek "the veneration of the masses," and are instead "content with, for example, a minor office or an income that just enables them to live" and pursue their scholarly interests (*HH*:291). As thinkers, these free spirits are "liberal-minded" not in the political sense, but in that they adhere to the value of a diversity of perspectives (*HH*: P6). The free spirit stands as an exception to the fact that in the modern world "time for thinking and quietness in thinking are lacking, one no longer ponders deviant views: one contents oneself with hating them" (*HH*:282).

Free spirits are also distinguished by a devotion to the pursuit of knowledge so passionate that they will continue to pursue it even when this leads them into direct conflict with the social mores and predominant morality of their day. Their independence of mind thereby opens the door to the discovery of truths which challenge these mores and this morality. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche discusses flaunting the ideals of one's age (regarding them as 'human, all too human') and declares: "The term 'free spirit' here is not to be understood in any other sense: it means a spirit that has become free, that has again taken possession of itself" (*EH* "Books" *HH*: 1). Nietzsche recognizes that to "take possession of oneself" as an individual, to have one's thinking and evaluating "free" of the mores and morality of one's day, is necessarily to face the opposition of these mores and morality. This is because "[t]he prescriptions called 'moral' are in truth directed against individuals and are in no way aimed at promoting their happiness" (*D*:108). *Human, All Too Human* discusses Socrates as a free spirit (*HH*:433), and a passage describing Socrates in *Daybreak* helps to clarify why Nietzsche might think so:

> [T]he individual is to sacrifice himself – that is the commandment of morality of custom. – Those moralists, on the other hand, who, following in the footsteps of Socrates, offer the *individual* a morality of self-control and temperance as a means to his own *advantage*, as his key to personal happiness, *are the exceptions* – and if it seems otherwise to us that its because we have been brought up in their after-effect: they all take a new path under the highest disapprobation of all advocates of morality of custom – they cut themselves off from the community, as immoral men, and are in the profoundest sense evil. (*D*:9)[55]

The free spirit's pursuit of knowledge may unwittingly lead him outside the realm of accepted beliefs and values, but insofar as the truths he discovers lead him to *challenge* these beliefs and values, he has begun what Nietzsche calls a "revaluation of values."[56] As we will discuss in depth later, the devotion to truth is itself an inheritance from this challenged morality, and thus the 'revaluation of values' is something of an internal critique. Nietzsche declares of *Daybreak* "in this book faith in morality is withdrawn – but why? *Out of morality!*" He calls this process "*the self-sublimation of morality*" (*D*: P4). Nietzsche discusses the free spirit's "decisive experience" as a "*great liberation*" from "all but unbreakable bonds" (*HH*: P3). He is clear that "in the case of men of a high and select kind" these bonds "will be their duties: that reverence proper to youth, that reserve and delicacy before all that is honoured and revered from of old, that gratitude for the soil out of which they have grown, for the hand which led them, for the holy place where they learned to worship" (*HH*:P3). As this quote makes clear, these "duties" from which the free spirit is liberated include not only the demands of religion and morality, but also the mores established by tradition and "revered from of old."

Nietzsche believes that this "great liberation" from the bonds of prevailing morality must involve an attack on the bad conscience which promotes and binds us

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[55] Thomas Brobjer, in his groundbreaking work "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard," cites this passage as a possible reference to Kierkegaard (as a strongly individualist moral thinker "in the footsteps of Socrates") – a comparison Kierkegaard may have welcomed. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2002) 261-63.

[56] In *The Antichrist* he declares: "Let us not underestimate this: *we ourselves*, we free spirits, are nothing less than a 'revaluation of all values'" (*A*:13). Yet in earlier writings the association of the free spirit with such a revaluation is much less explicitly stated. It seems that Nietzsche often read back into the 'free spirit' figure traits and tasks which he only fully developed long after this figure was 'invented.'

to this morality. Thus, he declares as a goal which "ought to be recognized and furthered by all men who are honest and seek the truth" that "a tremendous burden of bad conscience shall be expelled from the world" (*D*:164). That Nietzsche recognizes this as one of his own goals is evident in his proclamation: "we shall restore to men their goodwill toward the actions decried as egoistic and restore to these actions their value – *we shall deprive them of their bad conscience!"* (*D*:148).

The free spirit is one who stands free of the "prejudices of morality" but this does not mean that the free spirit is a libertine without a conscience, or just 'lets himself go.' To the contrary, Nietzsche is clear that the free spirit is "hostile" not only toward the constraints of religion and morality (including the bad conscience), but also toward "pleasure-seeking and lack of conscience" (*D*:P4). The free spirits live as 'men of conscience': "there is no doubt that a 'thou shalt' still speaks to us too, that we too still obey a stern law set over us" (*D*:P4). Nietzsche includes himself in this description, insisting: "in this if in anything we too are still *men of conscience*: namely, in that we do not want to return to that which we consider outlived and decayed" (*D*:P4). This free spirit's conscience is sometimes described as an "intellectual conscience," which directs him to pursue truth even when this entails opposition to the mores and morality of those around him (*GM* III:24). It directs him to refuse the way of life he finds "outlived and decayed," namely the way of life lived according to traditional morality and mores.

Nietzsche recognizes that reverence for tradition and morality have been useful, until now even *indispensable*, instruments in the history of humankind. As he says in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "The essential and invaluable element in every morality is that it is a protracted constraint" (*BGE*:188). He admits that this constraint may ultimately be a 'tyranny of arbitrary laws' but also notes "the strange fact" that "all there is or has been on earth of freedom, subtlety, boldness, dance and masterly certainty [...] has evolved only by virtue of the 'tyranny of such arbitrary laws'" (*BGE*:188). One of the great and penetrating questions that Nietzsche poses in *Human, All Too Human* is how a 'free spirit,' who by definition lacks this reverence

for traditional mores and morality, can have the constraint necessary to obey his own values and 'proceed along his own path':

> *Esprit fort*.— Compared with him who has tradition on his side and requires no reasons for his actions, the free spirit is always weak, especially in action; for he is acquainted with too many motives and points of view, and has, therefore, an uncertain and unpracticed hand. What means exist of nonetheless making him *relatively strong*, so that he will, at least, manage to survive, and will not perish ineffectually? What is the source of the strong spirit (*esprit fort*)? This is especially the question as to the production of genius. Whence comes the energy, the unbending strength, the endurance with which the one, in opposition to accepted ideas, endeavors to obtain an entirely individual knowledge of the world? (*HH*:230)

As we shall see, Nietzsche's understanding of the goal and task of his 'higher type' evolves from obtaining an "entirely individual knowledge of the world" to obtaining an entirely individual way of *living* in the world. If the free spirit is to stand on his own, without the benefit of tradition and "in opposition to accepted ideas," and yet still have the constraint necessary to live according to some values, he needs great strength. Obeying one's own conscience requires the strength of self-mastery, a strength Nietzsche attributes to the free spirits: " ' You shall become master over yourself, master also over your virtues. Formerly *they* were your masters; but they must be only your instruments beside other instruments. You shall get control over your For and Against and learn how to display first one and then the other in accordance with your higher goal'" (*HH*:P6).

Self-mastery allows a kind of self-sufficiency in which one can rely on one's own conscience, rather than a respect of traditional mores and morality, as the constraint by which one lives. This allows the 'free spirit' to engage in what Nietzsche calls "experiments in living": living according to one's own values and plan for how to live rather than according to the values and plans given by society or a (supposedly) transcendent source. Nietzsche declares as another goal which "ought to be recognized and furthered" by all honest, truth-seeking men that "numerous novel experiments shall be made in ways of life and modes of society" (*D*:164). Indeed, Nietzsche takes it as "precisely the sign of *great* health, that

superfluity which grants to the free spirit the dangerous privilege of living *experimentally* and of being allowed to offer itself to adventure: the master's privilege of the free spirit!" (*HH*:P4).

The ability to command and obey oneself also allows one to have the ability to influence or lead others. Thus, Nietzsche declares that as a scholar the free spirit has the "higher task of commanding from a lonely position the whole militia of scientific and learned men and showing them the paths to and goals of culture" (*HH*:282). By successfully living according to one's own conscience and values, one becomes a paragon and standard of value, not only of one's own particular conception of greatness, but also more generally of independence and free-spiritedness. Thus, Nietzsche proposes as an alternative to pitying our fellow man, helping him by "creating something out of oneself that the other can behold with pleasure" (*D*:174). This notion of 'creating something out of oneself' will become a key part of what Nietzsche later calls a new 'creation of values'.

§3 MATURE FORMULATIONS OF NIETZSCHE'S NEW HIGHER ETHICAL TYPE

Having reviewed how the free spirit figure embodies or at least prefigures independence, a revaluation of values, and a new kind of conscience, let us proceed to a discussion of how Nietzsche presents these ideas through the figure of the 'new philosophers' in *Beyond Good and Evil*. As explained above, these 'new philosophers' seem to be free spirits of a special kind (perhaps the "the perfect free spirit" Nietzsche mentions in *Human, All To Human* §231). It is therefore not surprising that the independence of these 'new philosophers' is described in much the same way as it was for the 'free spirits.' Nietzsche states that "today, being noble, wanting to be by oneself, the ability to be different, independence and the need for self-responsibility pertains to the concept 'greatness'" (*BGE*:212). Undoubtedly the most important way that these 'new philosophers' are independent lies in their being "beyond good and evil" (*BGE*:212). They are free from the slavish and world-renouncing values of ascetic morality, free from "the mob and its virtues and duties" (*BGE*:213).

Like the free spirits, the new philosophers are often described as scholars, yet Nietzsche insists that they not be confused with the scholars prevalent in his day (and, we might add, our own). In several passages, Nietzsche draws a sharp contrast between his 'new philosophers' and those scholars he calls "average" scientific "specialists" or "philosophical laborers after the noble exemplar of Kant and Hegel" (*BGE*:205, 206, 211, 213). Among the traits of these lesser scholars that Nietzsche finds undesirable are a petty narrowness of interests, a lack of creativity, and a tendency to promote mediocrity and conformity. They also have a stultifying tendency to make their scholarship into a matter of oppressive and ostentatious weightiness, rather than as a 'joyful science,' as Nietzsche believes it should be. Nietzsche also faults these scholars for their adherence to certain 'herd' values ("industriousness, patient acknowledgement of his proper place in the rank and file, uniformity and moderation in abilities and requirements") and for having other "ignoble" traits such as being "subservient, unauthoritative and un-self-sufficient" (BGE:206). In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche will clarify that such scholars are but the latest manifestation of ascetic ideals (*GM*:III:24).

In contrast, the new philosopher employs the rigorousness required of good scholarship, but he also enjoys his work as a 'joyful science': Nietzsche discusses the "bold, easy, delicate course and cadence of his thoughts," which are fitting for the "lordly task and lordliness of philosophy" (*BGE*:213, 204). The new philosophers employ "that genuinely philosophical combination of a bold exuberant spirituality which runs presto and a dialectical severity and necessity which never takes a false step," a combination Nietzsche finds unknown to most contemporary thinkers and scholars (*BGE*:213).

The notion that Nietzsche's hoped-for type represents great spirituality is an important one. In *Beyond Good & Evil*, Nietzsche often refers to spirituality without ever clearly defining what he means by this (e.g., *BGE*:188,201,213,219,227). But we can deduce that by "spiritual" Nietzsche does not mean anything transcendent or other-worldly; his spirituality expresses the inner richness, depth and joy which can

be found in *this* life.[57] The new philosopher's spirituality stands in contrast to the mediocrity and spiritual stagnancy that Nietzsche finds pervasive in the modern age.

Also in contrast to the mediocrity and smallness of modern men, the new philosophers are marked by a "readiness for great responsibilities" (*BGE*:213). They represent the "rare, strange, privileged, the higher man, the higher soul, the higher duty, the higher responsibility, creative fullness of power and mastery" to which the mediocrity and world-renouncing ideals of the age are opposed (*BGE*:212). Nietzsche honors a breadth of responsibility as belonging to the very nature of 'greatness.' He speculates that the new philosopher would see "the concept of 'greatness'" "precisely in his spaciousness and multiplicity, in his wholeness in diversity: he would even determine value and rank according to how much and how many things one could endure and take upon oneself, how *far* one could extend one's responsibility" (*BGE*:212). Here we find additional evidence against the common misconception that Nietzsche is an advocate of a narrow, selfish egoism. As we shall see, one of the "great responsibilities" these new philosophers take upon themselves involves the attempt to save humankind from the self-hating 'bad conscience' and nihilism of ascetic morality.

Diversity of perspectives and a freedom from dogmatism are hallmarks of greatness for the new philosopher, just as they were with the free spirits (*BGE*:43, 212). Yet Nietzsche is also careful to state that the new philosopher has certainty regarding his own standards of value. Although the new philosopher may sometimes take on the role of a skeptic, Nietzsche is wary of construing him as a skeptic *per se* (*BGE*:210). Likewise, Nietzsche is careful to emphasize that the new philosopher is not a critic *per se*, even though he shares certain traits with the critic which distinguish the critic from the skeptic :

[57]As we will see shortly, the idea that Nietzsche's hoped-for type represents a greater spirituality is also evident in the *Genealogy* (e.g. *GM* I: 16). Nietzsche's notion of spirituality will also be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

> I mean certainty in standards of value, conscious employment of a unity of method, instructed courage, independence and ability to justify oneself; indeed, they confess to taking a *pleasure* in negating and dissecting and to a certain self-possessed cruelty which knows how to wield the knife with certainty and deftness even when the heart bleeds. They will be *harder* (and perhaps not always only against themselves) than humane men might wish. . . (*BGE*:210)

We have already discussed the new philosopher's independence, but it will be useful to look more closely at the other traits described here in order to clarify what this independence involves or requires. Certainty in standards of value is of pivotal importance for the new philosopher. Without a sense of certainty regarding his own standards of value, he would not be able to "stand alone" (*Alleinstehn*); he would not be able to stand *on his own*, living independently of prevailing values and traditional constraints for upholding values. Those who attack the prevailing ascetic values without a certainty about their own values become nihilists in the sense Nietzsche most detests[58]: they conclude that a world devoid of transcendent value is a world devoid of value *per se*. As Nietzsche acknowledges, the truly difficult task is to free oneself from these values and constraints and yet still be able to uphold values, namely one's own. Hence Nietzsche believes that it is a "faith" in oneself, even more than the greatness of one's accomplishments, which determines whether one is a 'noble' today: "It is not the works, it is the *faith* which is decisive here, which determines the order of rank here, to employ an old religious formula in a new and deeper sense: some fundamental certainty which a noble soul possesses in regard to itself. . .*The noble soul has reverence for itself*" (*BGE*:287).

Self-reverence is one of the factors allowing for the new philosopher's ability to live on his own, constrained only by his own self-responsibility: he is constrained by reverence for himself rather than reverence for some external authority or set of commands. Of course, there is something odd about calling this faith he has in himself a 'constraint,' since it is also a joyful good conscience he has in regard to his

[58] As Solomon explains, Nietzsche is opposed to nihilism as the abandonment of all values and nihilism as hostility to life (the first and seventh of the ten types of nihilism Solomon discusses). Robert Solomon, "Nietzsche, Nihilism, and Morality" in Robert Solomon, *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays.* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973), 205.

life and the affirmation of himself and existence a whole. Yet this self-responsibility also requires severity with oneself, so the term 'constraint' is perhaps appropriate. As we shall see, it is a combination of self-severity and self-reverence which enable the new philosopher to take on "great responsibilities" while severed from traditional constraints, i.e. the ascetic guilty conscience and conformity to "the mob and its duties and virtues" (*BGE*:213).

Nietzsche advocacy of a "conscious employment of a unity of method" may surprise those who see his own aphoristic style as an disorganized and undisciplined 'grasping' at truths. Reading Nietzsche's accounts of his own works in *Ecce Homo* makes it clear that he considered himself to be using a unity of method. It may be that Nietzsche only discovered this unity of method in retrospect, but whether or not his own self-assessment is correct, it is evident that employing a unity of method is something he considered desirable. The notion of consciously employing a unity of method can also be understood as a corrective to misunderstandings of Nietzsche's call for the new philosophers to be "experimenters" and "attempters." Insofar as they venture to stand independently of (and opposed to) the traditional values and constraints for upholding values, the new philosophers do indeed perform a kind of "experiment." Before venturing to go beyond traditional values and constraints, they lack any assurance that they will succeed in living by their own values or even that successfully living by these values would prove satisfying. Yet Nietzsche indicates that one could be wrong in calling these new philosophers "attempters," that this name was itself "in the end only an attempt and, if you will, a temptation" (*BGE*:42). One evident danger in thinking of the new philosophers as 'attempters' and 'experimenters' is that these terms can have connotations of a "*mere* trying," or a haphazard *guessing* when it comes to how to live life. Obviously, a new philosopher armed with a sense of self-certainty and faith in herself regarding her standards of value should not be thought of as an 'attempter' in this sense.

As with all experiments, there is a risk involved in the new philosopher's experiments in living by his own values. Nietzsche says that the new philosopher

"bears the burden and duty of a hundred attempts and temptations of life – he risks *himself* constantly, he plays *the* dangerous game" (*BGE*:205). The new philosopher risks himself in venturing to go beyond traditional values and constraints since, as we have said, he has no assurance that he will succeed in living by his own values. If he fails, he will either face the nihilism of a world without any values, or he will face a guilty verdict according to his own values and according to the traditional values he has sought to replace. Due to this risk, the new philosopher will need great courage. Courage is often listed by Nietzsche as a virtue, but here the specification that this courage is "instructed" (*gewitzten*) may indicate that this courage is not some innate character trait, but rather something that the new philosophers have learned from their own experiences. There is also a connotation of sharpness, shrewdness, or wittiness in the term *gewitzten*. Perhaps by "courage," Nietzsche has in mind the fearless wit of a critic like Voltaire rather than the stalwart courage of a Prussian military man.

For Nietzsche, the "ability to justify oneself" (*Sich-verantworten-können*) is closely related to the ability to live by one's own responsibility (*Verantwortung*), i.e. the ability to uphold one's own values out of a sense of responsibility and self-reverence. In general, the term "to justify oneself" may mean no more than showing that one stands 'in the right' in relation to the value judgments of prevailing morality. In other words, justifying oneself may simply mean justifying oneself to others on the basis of what Nietzsche calls the values of the 'herd'. But for these new philosophers, justifying oneself is a different and much more challenging task. It means to justify oneself to oneself according to one's own values. In other words, it is the ability to successfully live by one's own values such that one can affirm oneself as justified in relation to them. Especially if one sets high expectations for oneself in these values, this can be quite challenging. Thus Zarathustra warns: "many a one *can* command himself but be very remiss in obeying what he commands!" (Z: "Of Old and New Law-Tables"). Moreover, to take responsibility for oneself entails the need to judge oneself fairly and honestly, to evaluate whether one has succeeded and to determine what is to be done if one has

not succeeded. In pointing out what is required to meet this challenge and how it relates to the idea of 'experimentation' and 'risk' discussed a moment ago, Nietzsche has Zarathustra proclaim:

> commanding is more difficult than obeying. And not only because the commander bears the burden of all who obey, and that this burden can easily crush him. In all commanding there appeared to me to be an experiment and a risk: and the living creature always risks himself when he commands. Yes, even when he commands himself: then also must he make amends for his commanding. He must become judge and avenger of his own law." (Z:"Of Self-Overcoming").

To justify oneself in Nietzsche's sense requires becoming "judge and avenger of one's own law." For this reason, the attempt to live by one's own self-responsibility is always beset by the danger of self-indulgence: one might think that one could succeed best by simply setting one's expectations comfortably low, by altering one's values to reflect any change of whim or circumstance, or by generously pardoning or overlooking any lapses in one's adherence to one's own values. But then this living by one's own values becomes nothing more than another instance of "letting oneself go," a nihilistic collapse into mediocrity. In contrast, Nietzsche is clear that successfully living according to one's own values requires great hardness and severity with oneself. He states: "Today the taste of the age and the virtue of the age weakens and attenuates the will. . .consequently, in the philosopher's ideal precisely the strength of will, the hardness and capacity for protracted decisions, must constitute part of the concept 'greatness'" (*BGE*:212).

Moreover, the new philosophers may apply the same severity and hardness to others and their values that they do to themselves. As quoted above, Nietzsche thinks these new philosophers "will be *harder* (and perhaps not always only against themselves) than humane men might wish" (*BGE*:210). In particular, the new philosophers display hardness, cruelty and self-severity as they cut into the heart and values of their age: "they confess to taking a *pleasure* in negating and dissecting and to a certain self-possessed cruelty which knows how to wield the knife with certainty and deftness even when the heart bleeds" (*BGE*:210). The image of a

surgeon vivisecting a living body is one which Nietzsche often employs the describe the ethical task of the philosopher. He may be consciously borrowing this image from Socrates, and he certainly associates this task of vivisecting values with Socrates. Nietzsche describes how Socrates, in order to counter the "wearied instincts" of "conservative ancient Athenians who let themselves go," employed "that Socratic malicious certitude of the old physician and plebian who cut remorselessly into his own flesh as he did into the flesh and heart of the 'noble'" (*BGE*:212). The result of the philosopher's vivisection of values is twofold: to reveal the weakness, self-indulgence and hypocrisy behind the values of one's age, and to reveal a higher possibility for human values:

> By laying the knife vivisectionally to the bosom of the very virtues of the age they betrayed what was their own secret: to know a new greatness of man, a new untrodden path to his enlargement. Each time they revealed how much hypocrisy, indolence, letting oneself go and letting oneself fall, how much falsehood was concealed under the most honoured type of their contemporary morality (*BGE*:212).

This vivisection of values revealing the weakness of prevailing morality and a new, higher possibility for humankind is part of the great task Nietzsche elsewhere calls a "revaluation of values." He suggests that it is the new philosophers who will perform this task, and it is therefore to them that we should turn our hopes when facing "man in decay, that is to say in diminishment, in the process of becoming mediocre and losing his value":

> whither must *we* direct our hopes? – Towards *new philosophers*, we have no other choice; towards spirits strong and original enough to make a start on antithetical evaluations and to revalue and reverse 'eternal values'; towards heralds and forerunners, towards men of the future who in the present knot together the constraint which compels the will of millennia on to *new* paths. (*BGE*:203).

As this quote reveals, the revaluation of values involves more than simply reversing or assigning new value to 'eternal' (i.e., ascetic, world-renouncing) values. It also means 'knotting together' a new "constraint." Nietzsche explicitly connects

this notion of constraint to the concepts of conscience and responsibility, specifying the need for "a revaluation of values under whose novel pressure and hammer a conscience would be steeled, a heart transformed to brass, so that it might endure the weight of such a responsibility" (*BGE*:203). The new revaluation of values that Nietzsche calls for does not involve establishing new *universal* values, as the earlier revaluation of values had done. To the contrary, it primarily involves the development of a new, individual kind of conscience and sense of responsibility. The nature of this new "conscience" and "responsibility" merit further discussion. Likewise, I will explore how Nietzsche understands the task of developing "antithetical evaluations."

The first thing to point out is that this "conscience" is clearly not the "bad conscience" from which Nietzsche hopes the free spirits will deliver us (*HH*:148, 164). The new philosopher's conscience is formed from the revaluation of precisely those so-called 'eternal' values which currently foster (and thrive on) this 'bad conscience.' The conscience formed from the revaluation of ascetic morality would obviously be a new and different form of conscience compared with the bad conscience of ascetic morality. (There does seem to be a genealogical relation between them, but an account of this relation will have to wait until we discuss the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche discusses a "variety of forms of conscience.")

What is this conscience of the new philosophers and how does it differ from the 'bad conscience' Nietzsche opposes? This conscience is a "constraint" on the new philosopher, one which enjoins him to the tasks for which he is responsible. It also seems to be an inner source of strength, perhaps the strength of his convictions, which prompts him to "endure the weight of such a responsibility" (*BGE*:203). In these respects, the new philosopher's conscience seems to resemble a conscience in the ordinary sense.[59] However, Nietzsche might insist upon an important difference:

[59] *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines "conscience" as: "1 **a**: the sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good **b**: a faculty, power, or principle enjoining good acts."

the conscience as we ordinarily find it binds us to what he calls "the virtues and duties of the mob."

In contrast, the new philosopher's conscience enjoins him to the virtues and duties which he sets for himself in the revaluation of 'eternal values.' To put the matter differently, the conscience ordinarily acts as a kind of fetter binding a person to the values and judgments of the 'herd' or of those who manipulate the herd. In contrast, the new philosopher's conscience is precisely what allows him to live independently of such a fetter. In Zarathustra's language, this conscience is what binds 'he who commands himself' to obey what he commands of himself. For Nietzsche only this kind of self-constraint (contraining oneself to obey one's own commands) represents genuine self-mastery.

We have already discussed the importance of self-severity and self-reverence as factors contributing to the new philosopher's conscience. These concepts can also help clarify the difference between the new philosopher's conscience and the 'bad conscience' it replaces. The 'bad conscience' is indeed a manifestation of self-severity: a severity with which one tortures oneself. (As Nietzsche makes clear in the *Genealogy* the 'bad conscience' is primarily a means of self-torture rather than a means of self-governance). The new philosopher's conscience is a manifestation of his self-severity – yet unlike the 'bad conscience', it is also a manifestation of self-reverence and self-affirmation. Hence, this form of self-severity functions not to tear oneself down but to build oneself up, to make one stronger, more self-severe, and ready to take on the 'great responsibilities' of which one feels oneself worthy. This new form of conscience bids one to obey out of a reverence for oneself rather than from a hatred of oneself, as is the case with the slavish 'bad conscience'.

The conscience of the new philosopher, then, is a form of self-constraint and self-mastery born out of a severity and reverence toward oneself. At this point the question may be asked: does this revaluation of 'eternal' values involve developing new values and a new kind of conscience only for the new philosopher who performs this revaluation of values? If so, it is hard to see how these new philosophers fulfill Nietzsche's broader mission to deprive men of their 'bad

conscience' or expel the 'bad conscience' from the world (*HH*:148, 164). In order to answer this question, we must first turn to what Nietzsche says about the task to "make a start" (*die Anstösse geben*, alternately: 'take the initiative') on "antithetical evaluations." I believe that it is in relation to this task that we can best understand Nietzsche's proclamation of these new philosophers as "*commanders and law-givers*," as those who "create values" and can "command and *lead* in the realm of knowledge" (*BGE*:211, 205).

The creative and legislative task of the new philosophers may be understood in contrast to the task of 'philosophical laborers' which is "to take some great fact of evaluation—that is to say, former assessments of value, creations of value which have become dominant and are for a while called "truths"—and identify them and reduce them to formulas, whether in the realm of *logic* or of *politics* (morals) or of *art*" (*BGE*:211). In other words, most philosophers presuppose the correctness of prevailing values (or they simply presuppose that there are no other values). Nietzsche finds that even some of the greatest skeptics and philosophical critics work under a presumption of obedience to prevailing morality. They understand their work as being in the service of this morality, and they take upon themselves the task of reducing this morality to formulas in order to make it "clear, distinct, intelligible and manageable" (*BGE*:211). At most, such philosophers can also take on the task of acting as the "bad conscience of their age" if, for example, they take the present generation to task for not abiding by these accepted values (*BGE*:212). In contrast, Nietzsche says that the task of the new philosophers "demands that he *create values*":

> *Actual philosophers*, *however*, *are commanders and law givers*: they say "thus it *shall* be!," it is they who determine the Wherefore and Whither of mankind, and they possess for this task the preliminary work of all the philosophical laborers, of all those who have subdued the past—they reach for the future with creative hand, and everything that is or has been becomes for them a means, an instrument, a hammer. Their "knowing" is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving, their will to truth is—*will to power*. (*BGE*:211)

There is much here that Nietzsche leaves unexplained. The notion of a 'creation of values' we have discussed before, in relation to the ancient 'nobles.' There we said that a 'creation of values' was not an arbitrary labeling of some things as 'good' nor was it the *ex nihilo* creation of new things to be revered as good. Rather, it was the immediate self-affirmation of the noble who feels himself to be strong, well-constituted, and happy and who therefore honors himself and those like him as 'good.' The new philosophers do seem to be self-affirming. (One might even say: certainty regarding one's one own standards of value and the ability to justify oneself according to them necessarily yields self-affirmation.) But the new philosopher's self-affirming 'creation of values' is not immediate like the ancient noble's 'creation of values.' Rather, it takes place through a revaluation of values, a second revaluation of values in which the values forged in the first revaluation of values ("the slave revolt in morals") are themselves revaluated. The 'creation of values' Nietzsche hopes for in the future involves reclaiming oneself from the ascetic ideal and its self-hating guilty conscience and coming to see oneself in a new light, according to new values. Those who are strong enough to do so thereby gain the ability to see themselves as 'good' and 'worthy.' Thus, Nietzsche remarks upon the "*second innocence*" that the modern advent in European atheism may bring (despite, Nietzsche might add, the *ressentiment* and lingering asceticism among many of the "pale atheists" themselves) (*GM* II: 20).

It is obvious to Nietzsche that not everyone who seeks to throw off the constraints of prevailing values thereby gains the ability to affirm himself as 'good' and 'worthy,' and we have already seen some reasons why. But an important question remains: are the values 'created' in the new philosopher's 'creation of values' for himself alone, or are they also to be proffered to others in some way? This returns us to the question we deferred earlier about whether the new philosopher could be understood as fulfilling Nietzsche's broad mission to expel the 'bad conscience' from the world. Is the new philosopher to be a single shining light in a world otherwise darkened with the "gloomy skies" of asceticism and nihilism, or does he bring this 'light' of a good conscience and self-affirmation to others?

I think the answer lies in seeing the unity of these two propositions: to live by your own values can be to set a new standard and challenge for others, not a challenge to adopt *your* particular values, but to develop and live by their own values. Nietzsche is clear that the new philosopher is proud that his values are not for everyone: "'My judgement is *my* judgement: another cannot easily acquire a right to it' – such a philosopher of the future may perhaps say. One has to get rid of the bad taste of wanting to be in agreement with many" (*BGE*:43). On the other hand, by standing on his own, as an example of successful independence and as a paragon of his own virtues, the new philosopher is able to help others. He is not only able to give them hope, he is also able to give them an example of how living by one's own values is a concrete possibility. Perhaps more importantly, he gives others a *challenge*. He warns them of the dangers of lingering asceticism and 'bad conscience' and forces them to admit that there are higher possibilities which they could attempt to attain. This challenge leaves those who have ears for such things with a task: to 'create out of oneself' this higher possibility, to live by one's own values and '*become who you are*.'[60] The new philosopher does not act as the voice of conscience for his readers beyond challenging them to liberate themselves from that which prevents them from thriving as individuals. The great liberation from the 'bad conscience' promoted by ascetic morality does not involve the imposition of another collectively-held sense of conscience. It involves an exhortation to have one's own independent conscience, and it provides a demonstration of this way of life as a concrete possibility in contemporary life.

We have been discussing the new philosopher's 'creation of values' as if the values created were necessarily ethical values. (Perhaps with good reason: this creative process may need to *include* the creation of ethical values if it's going to serve as a serious challenge and replacement of ascetic values.) Yet Nietzsche gives examples which indicate that these new values could be of other kinds: for example,

[60] I believe this is also what Nietzsche means by the "*One thing needful.* – To 'give style' to one's character, a great and rare art!" (*GS*:290). Nietzsche describes this process as organizing oneself into a unity in which all of one's strengths and weaknesses into an "artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye."

aesthetic values, or values regarding what makes for good quality work in scholarship. A literal reading of the new philosopher as a "commander and law-giver" might make it seem that he is a leader in a political or military sense, and perhaps Nietzsche allows this as a possibility. But other passages indicate that Nietzsche is thinking of someone who will "command" and "*lead* as a man of knowledge" (*BGE*:205). Whether Nietzsche is thinking of himself here, we can use him as an example. To whatever extent scholars after Nietzsche been influenced by him, have heeded his warnings and attacks on both specific ideas and methods of scholarship, we could say that he is a "leader" in the realm of knowledge.

Artistic creation may be the central metaphor underlying Nietzsche's conception of a 'creation of values,' yet artistic creation need not be merely *analogous* to a creation of values. We can easily see from what we have said so far that a great artist may be said to 'create' aesthetic values. Great innovators in the arts such as Wassily Kandinsky, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, or Miles Davis do more than just create artworks; they create values by proposing 'this way of doing things is beautiful, interesting, of the highest quality.' An example closer to Nietzsche's heart might be Goethe. Nietzsche's great "reverence" for Goethe is partly an admiration for Goethe as a man (i.e., ethically) (*TI* "Expeditions" 51). We find in his description of Goethe many of the characteristics of the new philosopher. He represents a "self-overcoming" of his age, a man with great courage, a breadth of responsibility and a love of life who "did not sever himself from life, he placed himself within it; nothing could discourage him and he took as much as possible upon himself" (*TI* "Expeditions" 49). He also stands as a paragon of independence: "he disciplined himself to a whole, he *created* himself" (*TI* "Expeditions" 49). Yet it is undeniable that Nietzsche also admired Goethe as an artist. By producing masterworks like *Faust*, Goethe had raised the bar for what counts as greatness in German literature (and literature generally). Perhaps the 'creation' of any kind of value may be understood in a similar way: one does not simply excel in relation to prevailing values, one sets a new standard for value which others are now challenged to meet.

As a final word on the new philosopher's way of life, let us consider another aspect of artistic creation that Nietzsche urges us to bear in mind. We have discussed the "tasks" required to live independently: the task of 'knotting together' a new constraint (the self-severity and self-reverence of a conscience) and task of 'creating' new values. But one need not *consciously* seek to fulfill these tasks. Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of what is instinctive and unconscious as guides for life, bidding us to follow the example of artists, who "know only too well that it is precisely when they cease to act 'voluntarily' and do everything of necessity that their feeling of freedom, subtlety, fullness of power, creative placing, disposing, shaping reaches its height" (*BGE*:213). Nor should the new philosopher approach these tasks with the self-severity one who *forces* himself to do some odious job. In rejecting the ascetic way of life, the hoped-for alternative to 'letting oneself go' is not a grinding, conscious self-control, but what Nietzsche calls letting oneself "*flow*" (*strömen*) (*BGE*:206).

In order to clarify how a self-constraint can also be a 'letting oneself flow,' we will need to turn to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals,* which Nietzsche introduced as: "A Sequel to My Last Book, *Beyond Good and Evil,* Which It Is Meant to Supplement and Clarify." There Nietzsche clarifies important issues left unaddressed in his account of the new philosophers, including the question: what goes on in the revaluation of ascetic values such that a way of life constrained only by one's own conscience (i.e. an autonomous way of life) becomes possible?

In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche does not return to the label 'new philosophers' although this work also contains 'pointers' toward a higher way of life at three key places in the text. At the end of the first essay, Nietzsche discusses the person with a "higher," "more spiritual nature" who is a "genuine battleground" between the conflicting values of the ascetic and noble modes of valuation (GM I:16). Then at the beginning of the second essay, Nietzsche introduces the figure of the "sovereign individual," a paragon of independence, autonomy and self-reverence who lives by his own conscience. Lastly, the second essay ends with references to a 'creative spirit' who is "strong and original enough" to reverse the ascetic bad conscience and

redeem us from the "hitherto reigning ideal" (GM II:24) Nietzsche does not explicitly link these descriptions and it may be tempting to see them as descriptions of three separate figures. Yet I will demonstrate that the better interpretation takes them to be three descriptions of the same figure. Moreover, our examination of the figure which emerges as Nietzsche ideal type in the *Genealogy* will reveal how closely this figure matches the 'new philosophers' and 'free spirits' already discussed. I will end the chapter by making this case and by giving a summary portrait of Nietzsche's new, higher ethical type.

Nietzsche concludes the first essay of the *Genealogy* by explaining:

> The two opposing values 'good and bad,' 'good and evil' have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years; and though the latter value has certainly been on top for a long time, there are still places where the struggle is as yet undecided. One might even say that it has risen ever higher and thus become more and more profound and spiritual: so that today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a '*higher nature*,' a more spiritual nature, than that of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposed values. (GM, I: 16).

Nietzsche says very little else about what this higher nature might be like except to suggest as a "symbol" for this struggle "inscribed in letter legible across all human history": "Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome" (GM I:16). He admits that Judea has "won *for the present*" although he finds in the Renaissance "an uncanny and glittering reawakening of the classical ideal" and he reveres Napoleon as a "last signpost to the *other* path": "the ideal of antiquity itself stepped *incarnate* and in unheard-of splendor before the eyes and conscience of mankind" (GM I: 16). Clearly Nietzsche favors the ancient ideal (the noble mode of valuation) over its counterpart, yet the description his "higher" "more spiritual nature" as a 'battleground' between these two values makes it clear that Nietzsche's hopes do not lie with any atavistic or reactionary 'return of the masters'. As we shall see, his hoped-for type could not have this higher, more spiritual nature without the influence of the "long reign" of ascetic ideals.

As we mentioned above, one of the questions addressed in the *Genealogy* is how self-constraint and a conscience become possible. Nietzsche addresses this question genealogically as well as psychologically. He begins the second essay of the *Genealogy* by introducing the "task nature has set itself in the case of man" and "the real problem *regarding* man" as the task to "breed an animal with the *right to make promises*" (GM I:1). According to Nietzsche, the ability to make and keep promises is pivotal for the earliest relations between humans (that between creditor and debtor), and later for life within society (in exchange for which one promises "five or six 'I will not's'"). The "highest manifestation" of this development is the ability to 'stand as one's own guarantor' and promise like a sovereign, i.e. constrained only by one's own sense of responsibility and conscience. Nietzsche calls the sovereign individual the "ripest fruit" of this process, employing a metaphor that he had earlier used to describe the new philosophers (*BGE*:205) and the free spirits (*BGE*:P2).

Many Nietzsche scholars overlook the dramatic differences between the two promise-makers discussed in the first sections of the second essay, so it may be helpful to clarify these differences. The man of "five or six I will not's" keeps promises out of a fear of punishment which has been "burned" into his memory through the gruesome tortures (or threat thereof) that Nietzsche describes. In contrast, the sovereign individual keeps promises out of an instinctive sense of self-affirmation and self-reverence. As Nietzsche makes clear, the development of the man of "five or six I will not's" is necessary for the earliest development of society, whereas the sovereign individual is a "*late* fruit," "the ripest fruit" of society and the morality of mores. Thus while both types of promise-makers might be considered products of the morality of mores, the sovereign individual is an "emancipated individual" "liberated" from the morality of mores and is "like only unto himself." In contrast, the man of 'five or six I will not's' seems to be the 'herd man' Nietzsche derides elsewhere, fully under the reign of the morality of mores which makes men "like among like" (GM II:2). Needless to say, this figure can hardly be imagined to possess the other characteristics attributes to he sovereign individual: having

independent will, autonomy, the right to affirm oneself, respect and reverence for oneself and others, etc.

Before discussing the sovereign individual further, we should briefly clarify the "preparatory task" necessary for any ability to make promises: "that one first makes men to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and consequently calculable. The tremendous labor of that which I have called 'morality of mores'" (*die Sittlichkeit der Sitte*) (GM II:2). Nietzsche directs us to several passages in *Daybreak* (§ 9, 14, 16) in which the 'morality of mores' is discussed. In his preface he had mentioned the morality of mores as "that much older and more primitive species of morality which differs *toto caelo* from the altruistic mode of evaluation" and directed us to *Human, All-Too-Human* Vol. I §96, 99 and Vol. II §89. Yet reading these passages does not yield a unified picture of what the morality of mores is, beyond establishing a basic, formal definition: "to be ethical means to practice obedience towards a law or tradition established from of old" (*HH*:96).

In particular, it is difficult if not impossible to decisively place the morality of mores in a historical timeline or in relation to the noble and ascetic moralities already discussed. Sometimes the morality of mores is described as a "*prehistoric* labor," a "primitive" form of morality which differs dramatically from the altruistic (i.e. slavish, ascetic) mode of valuation which Nietzsche says has been dominant "for a long time" (GM II:2, GM P:4, GM I:16). Yet Nietzsche also describes the morality of mores as that "under which all the communities of mankind have lived, many millennia before the beginnings of our calendar and also on the whole during the course of it up to the present day (we ourselves dwell in the little world of exceptions and, so to speak, in the evil zone)" (*D*:14). Sometimes the morality of mores is described as having values we would associate with 'master morality' (e.g., an advocacy of cruelty and a denunciation of pity in *Daybreak* §18) and sometimes, to the contrary, it is described as having values we would associate with 'slave' or 'ascetic' morality (e.g. holding "benevolence, pity, and that sort of thing" as good) (*HH*:96).

For our purposes, it is not necessary to resolve these contradictions completely, but for the sake of understanding references to the morality of mores in the texts cited, I offer the following explanation. The morality of mores should not be steadfastly identified with either master or slave morality. Rather, it should be understood as a formal description of how values are learned or acquired, namely through conformity to established customs and customary beliefs. As such, the content of these values may be those of the 'nobles' or those of the 'slaves.' Thus, Nietzsche indicates that there was a historical context (e.g. in the Greek and Roman world) in which master morality was predominant and established the values and mores to which the populace conformed. He portrays Socrates and Jesus as free spirits[61] of a sort who oppose the morality of mores as they find it. Both establish values antithetical to the content of the values of their day (the values of master morality) and to the form in which this morality was acquired (conformity to established beliefs). Yet in time the values that these thinkers proposed (or at least their derivative in the form of "Christian-Platonic values") became dominant in European society and were thereafter acquired by conformity. Thus, it may be helpful to distinguish between Nietzsche's attacks on the morality of mores *per se* (as conformity to a established mores in opposition to self-constraint and independence) and his attacks on what is perhaps only the latest determinant of the morality of mores, slave and ascetic morality (as self-hating, life-denying and world-renouncing.) As we shall see, Nietzsche's remarks about the sovereign individual in the beginning of the second essay tend to address this opposition to conformity to 'herd values' (the morality of mores *per se*) and his remarks about the 'creative spirit' at the end of the essay tend to address this opposition to ascetic world-renunciation and self-hatred. Since the 'herd values' of today *are* ascetic values, these paths of opposition are ultimately unified.

[61] cf. *Human, All Too Human* I:433, *Daybreak* §9, and *Antichrist* §32.

Nietzsche begins his description of the sovereign individual by speaking of his independence from the morality of mores.[62] He characterizes this independence in terms of autonomy.

> If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last reveal *what* they have simply been the means *to*: then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for "autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive). In short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will and the *right to make promises* and in him a proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of what has at length been achieved and become flesh in him, a consciousness of his own power and freedom, a sensation of mankind come to completion. (*GM* II:2)

Nietzsche notes the necessary opposition between autonomy[63] and being "moral" in the customary sense (*Sitte*). This is perhaps an allusion to Kant's much bedeviled efforts to reconcile autonomy with the duty to obey universal ethical laws. Nietzsche presents it as obvious that the opposite is the case: to be autonomous, to give oneself laws as an individual, is to eschew (and be condemned by) any morality which demands universal obedience to ethical laws. This is a further elaboration on the opposition between independence and prevailing societal values discussed above in relation to the 'free spirits.' There we also discussed Nietzsche's concern that those who free themselves from the traditional constraints of conformity to mores and 'herd' morality would need to be especially strong (as he says, they would need to be *esprit fort* - strong spirits) in order not to be "weak" and "ineffectual" compared with those who cling to these constraints.

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[62] In labeling this figure as 'sovereign' Nietzsche is undoubtedly drawing on our understanding of 'sovereign nations' that are free from external control. But he may also be thinking back to what Aristotle says about the noble egoist in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Just as a state and every other organized system seems to be in the truest sense identical with the most sovereign element in it, so it is with man. Consequently, he is an egoist or self-lover in the truest sense who loves and gratifies the most sovereign element in him" (NE 1168b32). For Aristotle the sovereign element in a man is reason, whereas for Nietzsche it is a dominating instinct.

[63] This autonomy distinguishes the sovereign individual not only from the slavish conformist and 'herd man', but also from the ancient nobles, who "are held so sternly in check *inter pares* by custom," and from the 'original masters' and founders of states who lack all notion of "responsibility" (*GM* I:11, II:16). Moreover, the sovereign individual is distinguished from the ascetic priest by the fact that he is self-affirming and outwardly masterful rather than self-hating and outwardly impotent.

I believe that the account of the sovereign individual can be understood in relation to Nietzsche's search for the "source of the strong spirit (*esprit fort*)" (*HH*:230). The source of the *esprit fort* may be found in a kind of self-strengthening or self-reinforcing cycle between three aspects of the sovereign individual's way of life: self-affirmation, sovereignty with respect to oneself (self-mastery, autonomy), and sovereignty in the world ('mastery' over circumstances and the 'right' to make promises.) After thoroughly reviewing the textual description of the sovereign individual, I will explain this cycle in greater detail.

One important discovery in this search for the source of a 'strong spirit' is that having self-mastery allows for mastery beyond oneself, for great efficacy in the world[64] and the ability to command and lead others:

> This emancipated individual, with the actual *right* to make promises, this master of a *free* will, this sovereign man—how should he not be aware of his superiority over all those who lack the right to make promises and stand as their own guarantors, of how much trust, how much fear, how much reverence he arouses—he "*deserves*" all three—and of how this mastery over himself also necessarily gives him mastery over circumstances, over nature, and over all more short-willed and unreliable creatures? (*GM* II:2)

The concept of 'mastery' presented here merits further discussion. Obviously having "mastery over" something in this sense is not to be understood as having complete control over it. (It would be absurd to think that self-mastery grants omnipotent control over circumstances or nature.) 'Mastery' here seems to mean a great competency and determined efficacy made possible by a protracted, independent will.[65] Likewise, as I have suggested, 'mastery' over others need not

[64]Nietzsche returns to this point in *Twilight* in his discussion of Thucydides, whom he credits with precisely this kind of self-mastery: "*Courage* in the face of reality ultimately distinguishes such natures as Thucydides and Plato: Plato is a coward in the face of reality – consequently he flees into the ideal; Thucydides has *himself* under control – consequently he retains control over things" (TI "Ancients" 2).

[65] As Nietzsche explains elsewhere, the essential thing for every morality is to provide a constraint in the sense of enforcing "protracted obedience in one direction" (*BGE*:188). Yet not every morality yields mastery. The difference lies in the fact that Nietzsche's highest types have their own independent will, whereas the vast majority are constrained to follow the will of the 'herd' or the ascetic priests as the shepherd of this herd. Here we may draw a distinction between self-mastery and mere self-control: one

signal a return to the oppression of the original masters or the feudal conditions which made the power of later 'nobles' possible. Nietzsche's point, as I take it, is that the ability to command and obey oneself yields the ability to lead others. Even self-mastery is not to be understood as 'complete control over oneself.' One does not get to create oneself *in tota* as one might wish to be. Nietzsche would be the first to suggest that there is much about oneself that one must simply accept and even love (*amor fati*) as inevitable facts of one's existence as a human being. As we have discussed, the kind of self-constraint Nietzsche favors is that of the artist who allows her creative drive to dominate over her other drives and thus guide her actions.

As we shall discuss shortly, the psychological or physiological explanation of the sovereign individual's self-mastery is that it is a state in which a certain kind of dominating drive sets one's other drives to order. But it is important to note here that it is precisely the ability to affirm oneself *as one actually is* that prompts one to 'let oneself flow' in the sense of letting one's dominant drive or passion guide one's life. Nietzsche contrasts the kind of internally antagonistic self-control of the ascetic with the more internally harmonious self-mastery of his ideal type. The ascetic holds his chaotic instincts in check by lashing out at them and attempting to deny their expression with the "tyranny" of reason or ascetic practices. (That one's natural 'drives' or instincts can lead one to temptation is one of the staples of the ascetic mindset, evidenced in Plato's tripartite soul and in the Christian wariness of the bodily 'drives.') As part of the general stance of self-denial and self-opposition, the ascetic stance is fundamentally opposed to the idea of letting oneself be dominated by one's instincts. Although this is one way of avoiding 'letting oneself go', Nietzsche thinks there is a better alternative. Someone whose stance toward themselves is fundamentally self-affirming welcomes the life lived on the basis of her instincts and lets herself 'flow' in the sense that she allows her guiding passion

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may control oneself in obeying the will of others, but genuine self-mastery requires obedience to a will of one's own.

to flow freely and to shape her life, unifying her other instincts and passions in the pursuit of excellence and creative achievement.

There is also an important connection between self-mastery and the sovereign 'right to make promises.' Both require a strong, "independent, protracted will." As Nietzsche had noted in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the "essential thing 'in heaven and upon earth' seems, to say it again, to be a *protracted* obedience in *one* direction" (*BGE*:188). Promise-making requires a "*memory of the will*" such that "between the original "I will," "I shall do this" and the actual discharge of the will, its *act*, a world of strange new things, circumstances, even acts of will may be interposed without breaking this long chain of will" (*GM* II:1). To have this "protracted obedience" be an obedience to *oneself* is to have the ability to stand as one's own guarantor when making promises. One who cannot obey himself keeps promises only by some external constraint, e.g., threat of punishment. Moreover, one who can only obey others will break a promise if and when commanded to do so. Building on our earlier discussion of the difference between the two promise-makers discussed in these sections, we can make the distinction between promise-making *simpliciter* (in which promises may be kept only out of fear or compulsion and are therefore guaranteed only by the strength of this fear and only insofar as those one obeys don't interdict against the promise) and promise-making *as a sovereign* (in which promises are kept by means of one's own independent, protracted will and upheld out of a reverence for oneself.)

We also find in the description of the sovereign individual a formulation of what Nietzsche had earlier called a 'creation of values.' Like the 'nobles' who created values by affirming themselves as good and taking themselves as the standard of goodness, the sovereign individual reveres himself as a measure and standard of ethical value:

> The "free" man, the possessor of a protracted and unbreakable will, also possesses his *measure of value*: looking out upon others from himself, he honors or he despises; and just as he is bound to honor his peers, the strong and reliable (those with the *right* to make promises)—that is, all those who

> promise like sovereigns, reluctantly, rarely, slowly, who are chary of trusting, whose trust is a *mark* of distinction, who give their word as something that can be relied on because they know themselves strong enough to maintain it in the face of accidents, even "in the face of fate"—he is bound to reserve a kick for the feeble windbags who promise without the right to do so, and a rod for the liar who breaks his word even at the moment he utters it. (*GM* II:2)

At this point it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the "*right* to make promises." The English translation may lead to the mistaken notion that this is some kind of political or natural right. The German simply says that the sovereign individual *may* make promises (*versprechen dürfen*). Nietzsche describes promising as a sovereign as more than an ability; it is also a privilege (*Privilegium*) which those who have this ability honor in each other. We should also consider what kind of promises Nietzsche might have in mind here. The only examples of promises he gives are of a debtor's promises to a creditor, but it would be odd if the sovereign individual were merely a very reliable debtor (indeed, it is hard to imagine this 'masterful' figure as a debtor at all). Likewise, it would be odd for Nietzsche to lavish so much praise on this new, highest manifestation of conscience if it were simply put to use fulfilling contractual or social promises. It seems more likely that the sovereign individual's promises also include ethical commitments, promises to uphold values and faithfully pursue the tasks and goals for which he has assumed responsibility.

It should be clear that upholding oneself as a standard of ethical value is a manifestation of the sovereign individual's self-reverence and self-affirmation. Yet there is a potentially problematic ambiguity in the notion of taking oneself as standard of value. It is the same ambiguity in the notion of "affirming oneself *as one actually is*" and in the call to "become who you are." The obvious response is: "but I already am who I am, so have I already attained Nietzsche's ideal?" (Brian Leiter advocates precisely this reading of the call to "become what you are," although

without acknowledging the objections which this reading entails.)[66] Likewise, it may seem like affirming oneself *as one actually is* and upholding one's actual self as the standard of ethical value invites complacency, stagnancy, and through these: mediocrity. How could there be any place for "becoming," for personal growth and development, if one has always already attained one's highest ethical ideal?

The resolution to this ambiguity comes from the realization that who you actually are includes all of your natural abilities and potential, including abilities and potential which Nietzsche thinks millennia of ascetic values have repressed and slandered to such an extent that we may be unaware or averse to them. His hopeful insistence that "the greatest possibilities in man are still unexhausted" can be applied to individuals as well as the whole human race. So to affirm oneself as one actually is, and to uphold one's actual self as a standard of value, is not to invite complacency, but to challenge oneself and others to bring these "greatest possibilities" to fruition. The sovereign individual judges others by the same standard that he judges himself, namely himself (including whatever natural abilities and potential remain unfulfilled in him.) Of course this formulation might engender the opposite worry: that in relation to his standard of value the sovereign individual always 'comes up short' and is therefore always condemned by his own standard of value. Yet we know that simply in virtue of becoming a sovereign individual, he has already fulfilled at least some of these 'greatest possibilities' (e.g. independence, self-mastery and "the highest, almost astonishing, manifestation" of conscience). So rather than saying that he is always condemned by his own 'measure of value', it is better to say that in relation to his 'measure of value' the

[66] Leiter cites Nietzsche's use of Pindar's 'become what you are' as evidence that Nietzsche thought of life (including his own) in terms of the kind of fatalism Leiter calls 'causal essentialism' (Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 83). Remarking on *Ecce Homo*, Leiter says: "We now have the answer to the book's subtitle: how one becomes what one is. The answer: by making no special effort *directed toward that end*, because one becomes what one is *necessarily*." (Leiter, 86). Yet Nietzsche's actual uses of this phrase becomes completely inexplicable if we ascribe to Leiter's reading. Nietzsche uses this phrase as a kind of exhortation to his readers or, as in his August 1882 letter to Lou Salome , as an "deep, heartfelt plea": "Lastly, my dear Lou, the old, deep, heartfelt plea: become the being you are!" (quoted from Solomon & Higgins, *Reading Nietzsche*, 93).

sovereign individual always finds his task: to continue to become who he is by continuing to develop his natural abilities and potential.

In this way I think Nietzsche's thoughts on the sovereign individual help to clarify his call to "become who you are." Nietzsche is calling us to develop the potential for excellence within ourselves. On one hand, this ideal calls us to accept who we are, i.e. to adopt an affirming stance towards ourselves. On the other hand, this ideal calls us to change who we are, including changing our stance from an aversion or antagonism towards ourselves to a stance of self-affirmation. As I shall discuss at length in Chapter 4, Nietzsche thinks that these two tasks are intimately related. The fact we utilize potential strengths and skills gained in the long history of ascetic ideals in liberating ourselves from these ascetic ideals is precisely what makes possible a total affirmation of ourselves in the mode of *amor fati* and saying 'yes' to eternal recurrence. But contrary to Leiter's suggestion, these developments and changes are not 'necessary' or inevitable; in fact, Nietzsche clearly expresses his worry that his call to "become who you are" by throwing off the ascetic stance may never be heeded.

Another important point that the sovereign individual passage clarifies is that to promise as a sovereign does not simply mean to have the strength to keep one's promises; it also means that one promises only with the greatest caution and care. One is careful to make only those promises one can fulfill. Without this qualification, we return to the absurdity of needing to think of the sovereign individual as omnipotent in order to make sense of the claim that he can fulfill his promises despite accidents and adverse circumstances. (I take it that Nietzsche puts the phrase "in the face of fate" in quotes to indicate the voice of another, perhaps one who is powerless and therefore regards all or most circumstances as inevitable. Alternately, Nietzsche may simply mean that the sovereign individual does his utmost to keep his promises even when all circumstances seem opposed to his doing so.) It is the sovereign individual's extreme caution in making promises, as well as his ethical strength to uphold them, that makes him trustworthy.

The last aspect of the sovereign individual I will discuss is his new form of self-constraint or "conscience":

> The proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate, has in his case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct. What will he call this dominating instinct, supposing he feels the need to give it a name? The answer is beyond doubt: this sovereign man calls it his *conscience*. (*GM* II:2)

Aware of how different this notion of conscience is from our common understanding of the term, Nietzsche goes on to clarify:

> His conscience?— It is easy to guess that the concept of "conscience" that we here encounter in its highest, almost astonishing, manifestation, has a long history and variety of forms behind it. To possess the right to stand security for oneself and to do so with pride, thus to possess also the *right to affirm oneself*—this, as has been said, is a ripe fruit, but also a *late* fruit... (*GM* II:3)

In the rest of the essay, Nietzsche goes on to trace the genealogy of the historical process which eventuates in this "highest manifestation" of conscience. In this passage we get something like a psychological (or even physiological) explanation for how this conscience becomes possible within the individual who possesses it. The sovereign individual's conscience is not some kind of superego or 'inner voice' in his mind, issuing guidance or condemnation from a reflective standpoint. Rather, this conscience is an instinct, the sovereign individual's "dominating instinct." Nietzsche often presents the self as a collection of drives, instincts and emotions; e.g., in *Beyond Good and Evil* he suggests that the concept of a "soul" may be retained if it is thought of as "a social structure of the drives and emotions" (*BGE*:12). The sovereign conscience, as we shall call it, is the "dominating instinct" which governs the whole of this 'social structure' of drives and emotions.

The first question to ask is what it means that this instinct is "dominating." Here I think we can learn from Nietzsche's own comparison of a dominating instinct with a dominating 'ruling class' in a society (e.g., in *BGE*:19). The dominating class

satisfies its own interests and imposes its own values, goals and interpretations on the society as a whole. But just as importantly, the dominating class is what first organizes people into a unity such that there could be a 'society as a whole' (GM II:17). Likewise, a "dominating instinct" is one which directs the self as a whole toward its own satisfaction. In order to do so, this dominating instinct must not only win out over the other competing drives, it must also set these drives to order in a more-or-less unified whole. Therefore, a sovereign conscience is on one hand that by which one gives oneself guidance and direction. On the other hand, it is also that which secures the integrity necessary to pursue one's projects, goals and commitments as a unified self.

Although an instinct, the sovereign individual's conscience is not an innate instinct (as we might expect all instincts to be.) Thus, we must try to understand what Nietzsche means by certain things '*becoming*' instinct and what it is that becomes an instinct for the sovereign individual. Although *prima facie* it may seem that instincts are typically considered to be innate, there are common examples in which what is at first consciously learned eventually 'becomes instinct.' For example, we might talk about an athlete's instincts and mean not simply the reflexes or coordination with which she was born but more primarily the instinctive skills she has developed through training, concentration, and practice. Likewise, we might talk about the instincts of a sailor, a soldier, or a teacher and mean not some innate predisposition or knowledge but the learned *techne* of seamanship, soldiering or teaching gained through conscious instruction and years of experience. Training which is at first consciously understood can "become instinct" as it becomes incorporated into a person's unconscious through repeated practice until it becomes an immediate, unreflective impulse or drive. (Often this training process even involves unlearning or learning to ignore some instincts and predispositions which are innate.[67]) Thus, the notion of something 'becoming instinct' is not so odd after

[67] As Nietzsche explains in relation to the task of 'giving oneself style': "Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it" (*GS*:290).

all; a conscious understanding may "penetrate to the profoundest depths" of a person and become an unconscious guide for action and judgment.

But what is it that 'becomes instinct' in the case of the sovereign individual? Nietzsche says it is the "proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate" (GM II:2). Note that the sovereign individual is free not just in the (negative) sense that he is "emancipated" from the directives and constraints of custom and traditional morality. He is also free in the (positive) sense that he possesses the power over himself and efficacy in the world required to fulfill the responsibilities with which he entrusts himself. This freedom is a rare privilege, the "privilege of *responsibility*": the ability to uphold promises and commitments as a sovereign (i.e., by one's own self-constraint.)

The sovereign individual knows himself to have this rare "privilege" because he is aware of the facts of his situation: he knows that has the power over himself and efficacy in the world necessary to stand as his own guarantor. But this awareness of the facts of his situation is precisely what allows him to have "faith in himself" when taking on new responsibilities and commitments. Moreover, as we have discussed, an awareness of his power and abilities (and what he can accomplish with them) also reinforces his self-reverence and justifies his revering himself as an ethical 'measure of value.' Thus, what has become instinct in him is both his conscious self-reverence and the awareness of what justifies this self-reverence: his actual power, efficacy and integrity in action, in 'the world'. His 'conscience' is the instinctive respect and trust he has in himself, the honor which he realistically accords himself. This 'sovereign conscience' bids him to uphold his promises and commitments out of an instinctive reverence for himself rather than out of fear or 'pangs' of guilt.

Of course what we have described here are merely the formal aspects of any sovereign conscience. The particular promises and commitments upheld will differ for each sovereign individual. To use two examples from above, this sovereign individual may be an artist taking on the responsibility of some artistic project or a

philosopher taking on the responsibility of some philosophical project. In either case, sovereign self-constraint is necessary both for the quality of the work produced (else it will tend to be unoriginal, not yet liberated from conformity and obedience to traditional morality) and for the actual production (else the constraint to finish the task may be lacking.) What is essential to both is a 'dominating instinct' which bids the person to take on this great task and to complete it as promised, an instinct formed by an internalized awareness of one's own abilities and potential.

It is here that we can understand how a self-constraint can also be an instinctive 'letting oneself flow' (as opposed to 'letting oneself go'.) 'Letting oneself go' means lacking any self-constraint and letting oneself be pulled along by this or that desire or external influence. Those who let themselves go may have one dominating instinct after another, but they lack the kind of dominating instinct Nietzsche requires: an instinctive self-reverence and responsibility that sets the other drives to order, establishes the unity of the self as a whole, and thereby makes possible the kind of 'protracted will' necessary to execute great tasks. (In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche defines *decadence* as precisely this kind of "anarchy of the instincts" (*TI* "Socrates" 4).) In contrast, those who 'let themselves *flow*' let themselves be unified and directed by this dominating instinct.

Having completed our analysis of the inner workings of the sovereign individual, we are in a position to explain what we earlier called a self-strengthening cycle within this ethical type. Nietzsche explains that the sovereign individual's self-mastery and self-constraint allows a mastery in the world and the ability to make and keep promises. This mastery and integrity in the world gains the sovereign individual the reverence of others and reinforces his own self-reverence. He is aware that his self-reverence and the reverence of others accord with the facts of the world: his power over himself and the sovereignty in actions this allows. This allows him to affirm and have reverence for himself as he actually is. His self-reverence and the awareness of its concrete justifications have 'become instinct' for him. His conscience is an instinctive self-reverence, a guiding and dominating drive which sets his other drives, goals and values to order teleologically. His self is

thereby unified in the service to his highest calling, whatever 'great responsibilities' he takes upon himself. But this unification and direction of the self by an instinctive conscience is precisely the self-mastery and self-constraint with which the cycle began. Thus, in summary: self-affirmation and self-reverence become instinct and thereby allow for sovereignty with respect to oneself (self-mastery, self-constraint, autonomy); this sovereignty with respect to oneself allows for sovereignty with respect to the world (efficacy in action, the ability to promise as a sovereign and be trusted and revered as one) which in turn allows for (justifies, reinforces) self-affirmation and self-reverence.

What Nietzsche does not say is how this cycle gets started in the first place[68] or what discrete steps can be taken to become a sovereign individual. As we have seen, there is a great difference between the poor wretch who, facing the gruesome "*mnemotechnics*" of torture and punishment, finally developed a 'memory of the will' for "five or six 'I will not's'" – and the ripest fruit of this development, the sovereign individual. An important difference that has emerged is that from the newly tamed man to the contemporary 'herd' man, Nietzsche finds the majority of people to hate themselves and existence as a whole, whereas his highest types affirm themselves and existence. Nietzsche's genealogical work in the rest of the essay traces the development of the internalization of conscience and the historical grounds for the possibility of a reorientation from hatred of life to love of life.

There are actually two separate but sometimes intersecting genealogies traced in the second essay. They are the genealogy of the ability to make promises (what eventuates in what we might call a 'promise-making conscience') and the genealogy of the 'bad conscience' and its current ascetic manifestation, what we might call the 'guilty conscience':

1) The ability to make and keep promises originates in the debtor/creditor relationship, established long before the advent of social organizations. This

[68] There may be worry about this self-strengthening cycle requiring some logically questionable bootstrapping, yet there is nothing more mysterious about this cycle than the self-reinforcing relationship which may exist between the organs of a growing organism.

requires that a person first become uniform and be able to measure himself; it also requires a shared understanding of equivalent values (II:1-3). The concept of "guilt" comes from the conception of "debt" and at first has no moral connotations (II:4). After the advent of social organizations, the society as a whole is regarded as kind of creditor: in exchange for the benefits of society one promises "five or six 'I will not's'" and faces punishments if these promises are broken (II:9). As a society's power increased a feeling of indebtedness to it founders intensified, reaching a "maximum" when these founders become regarded as deities (II:20). Then, after a great gap, the sovereign individual emerges with the ability to make and keep promises by his or her own self-constraint or 'conscience'.

2) The 'bad conscience' begins with the advent of social organizations, which occurs when the 'original masters' conquer and organize an otherwise nomadic people. As a result of being confined within society, the "tamed man" cannot vent his aggressive natural drives. These drives are repressed but cannot be eliminated; they become redirected against the only victim within his power: himself (II:16-17). The 'bad conscience' is at first simply the self-laceration of this newly tamed man, the outpouring of *ressentiment* against himself. In particular, what the 'tamed' man most vehemently hates and attacks in himself are these natural and aggressive instincts themselves. The bad conscience is thus "a declaration of war against the old instincts upon which his strength, joy, and terribleness had rested hitherto" (II.16). The great process in which these instincts are turned inward, against themselves and their possessors, Nietzsche calls "the *internalization* of man…The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height" (II:16). Although Nietzsche regards the bad conscience as an illness, "the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, man's suffering *of man, of himself*," he also adds that this development is "*pregnant with a future*" (II:16).

These genealogies have intersected in at least two places historically, and may potentially intersect at a third. First, the system of equivalent punishments established in the debtor/creditor relationship are employed in enforcing the laws of

society once societies are formed (II:9,10). Equivalent punishments indirectly contribute to the formation of the 'bad conscience' insofar as they keep the person confined within the bounds of society and thereby prevent the exercise of the natural aggressive drives. But Nietzsche is careful to point out that punishment rarely produces feelings of guilt in the one punished, in part because the criminal finds that the practices of justice and crime are often the same (II:14). Punishments may also hinder the development of 'bad conscience' insofar as the creditor vents his aggressive drive in punishing the delinquent debtor and insofar as the rest of society gets to enjoy the "festive cruelty" of public punishment (II:5).

The next point of intersection comes when the concept of debt to God is borrowed from the history of the debtor/creditor relationship and is used a tool for the self-torture of the 'bad conscience' (II:22). As Nietzsche explains in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, this is the work of the ascetic priest. The resulting guilty conscience gives suffering a meaning ('I suffer because I am guilty'), thereby saving suffering humanity from "suicidal nihilism" brought about by suffering without meaning, the real "curse" under which mankind suffered (III.28). Yet the great sense of shame and self-hatred promoted by this guilty conscience, together with the weakening effects of ascetic ideals generally, has led to the nihilism that Nietzsche finds in the present age (II:7,21).

This leads us to the third, merely potential intersection between the genealogy of the promise-making conscience and the genealogy of the ascetic 'guilty conscience'. It comes when the heirs to the conscience-vivisection promoted by ascetic ideals reverse the ascetic bad conscience, wedding it to all the unnatural drives behind asceticism (the drive to the beyond) and to ascetic ideals, ideals which are "one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world" (II:24). I believe that this reversal is what makes the sovereign individual's kind of promise making possible by creating an internalized, self-affirming 'sovereign conscience'. In order to establish this connection, however, let us review the description of this reversal and the 'redeeming man' who accomplishes it. Nietzsche ends the second essay by suggesting that his polemic goal is both to tear down the 'hitherto reigning ideal'

(i.e., ascetic ideal) and to erect a new one. He describes this task as the work of a 'creative spirit' who inherits from the long reign of ascetic ideals and 'bad conscience' the courage, strength and skill necessary for a conscience-vivisection which is used against, rather than in the service of, the ascetic 'bad conscience':

> We modern men are the heirs of the conscience-vivisection and self-torture of millennia: this is what we have practiced longest, it is our distinctive art perhaps, and in any case our subtlety in which we have acquired a refined taste. Man has all too long had an "evil eye" for his natural inclinations, so that they have finally become inseparable from his "bad conscience." An attempt at the reverse would *in itself* be possible—but who is strong enough for it?—that is, to wed the bad conscience to all the *unnatural* inclinations, all those aspirations to the beyond, to that which runs counter to sense, instinct, nature, animal, in short all ideals hitherto, which are one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world. To whom should one turn today with *such* hopes and demands? (*GM* II:24)

The allusion to "conscience-vivisection" should bring to mind the vivisection metaphor discussed above in relation to a revaluation of values. Indeed, this reversal of the ascetic bad conscience seems to mark the beginning of the revaluation of ascetic values. The ascetic sense of guilt is turned against itself and against all ascetic ideals and the 'unnatural drives' from which they spring, thereby initiating an internal collapse of the ascetic mode of valuation.[69] The person who is able to perform this reversal of conscience has inherited the internalization and conscience formed in the 'long history' of the bad conscience and ascetic ideals. But contrary to all previous forms of conscience, this new conscience would seem to be joyful and self-affirming – exactly like the conscience previously attributed to the sovereign individual.

Another point of comparison between the sovereign individual and the creative spirit is that both stand in stark contrast to the tendency to 'let oneself go' Nietzsche finds endemic to the modern era. Nietzsche therefore recognizes that the

[69] In the fourth chapter, we will also explore another explanation Nietzsche offers for the internal collapse of ascetic values: the value of truthfulness promoted by ascetic (Christian/Platonic) ideals also promotes a discovery of the worldly 'will to power' at the heart of these ideals. The full force of condemnation by which ascetic ideals attack worldly power and ambition is thereby turned back on these ideals themselves.

reversal of the 'bad conscience' "would require a *different* kind of spirit from that likely to appear in this present age" (*GM* II:24). Both the sovereign individual and the 'creative spirit' are distinguished by an independent self-constraint and self-reverence lacking in 'modern man.' Nietzsche again makes the point, earlier presented in relation to the 'free spirits' and the 'sovereign individual,' that this independent self-constraint will earn a person the opposition of 'herd' and a condemnation by prevailing values:

> One would have precisely the *good* men against one; and, of course, the comfortable, the reconciled, the vain, the sentimental, the weary. What gives greater offense, what separates one more fundamentally, than to reveal something of the severity and respect with which one treats oneself? And on the other hand—how accommodating, how friendly all the world is toward us as soon as we act as all the world does and "let ourselves go" like all the world! (*GM* II:24)

Nietzsche ends his description of the 'creative spirit' by making more explicit the connection between this reversal of conscience and what he elsewhere calls the "revaluation of values" (cf. *BGE*:203) by which humankind can be saved from the impending threat of nihilism:

> Is this even possible today?— But some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the *redeeming* man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength will not let him rest in any aloofness or any beyond, whose isolation is misunderstood by the people as if it were flight *from* reality—while it is only his absorption, immersion, penetration *into* reality, so that, when he one day emerges again into the light, he may bring home the *redemption* of this reality: its redemption from the curse that the hitherto reigning ideal has laid upon it. This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from *that which was bound to grow out of it*, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man; this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness—*he must come one day*. (*GM* II:24)

Perhaps aware that such prophetic statements go beyond his polemic intentions for the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche adds: "But what am I saying? Enough!

Enough! At this point it behooves me only to be silent; or I shall usurp that to which only one younger, "heavier with future," and stronger than I has a right—that to which only *Zarathustra* has a right, *Zarathustra* the *godless*.—" (*GM* II:25).

Nietzsche does not explicitly link this 'creative spirit' figure to the 'sovereign individual' discussed above, and perhaps the similarities already noted are not conclusive proof of their unity. I therefore offer three additional arguments for the thesis that descriptions of the sovereign individual of the creative spirit are but two perspectives on the same single figure. The first and most decisive concerns the concept of a conscience. The sovereign individual is described as being the "highest, almost astonishing manifestation" of the concept of "conscience," a concept that "has a long history and variety of forms behind it" (*GM* II:2). The 'creative spirit' of *GM* II:24 clearly has a conscience (among other things he has a conscience against ascetic tendencies) and is clearly the inheritor of the "long history" of the conscience, a history including a "variety of forms" (the ascetic guilty conscience and its precursor, the self-torturous 'bad conscience' of the newly tamed man.) Therefore, as part of the long history of the conscience which eventuates in the sovereign individual's conscience, the 'creative spirit' must either come before the sovereign individual or be identical with this figure. It seems unlikely, given the fanfare Nietzsche lavishes on the 'creative spirit' ("this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness") that this figure is merely a precursor to the sovereign individual. The far more likely reading is that they are same figure, presented from different perspectives.[70]

[70] Someone may object that the creative spirit may have the *same* conscience as the sovereign individual (i.e., the highest form of conscience) but that the creative spirit is somehow a further development, going beyond a (mere) sovereign individual. It is certainly appealing to think of Nietzsche's ideal figure as not *merely* someone who can keep her commitments with a sovereign conscience, but as also someone who is creative and outstanding in what she accomplishes thereby. But this wider sense of being 'creative' is neither precluded from our understanding of the sovereign individual nor is it especially implied in the description of the 'creative spirit' at GM II:24. The 'creativity'Nietzsche refers to here is simply the redeeming overthrow of the ascetic bad conscience, its values, and its resultant nihilism. That is to say, this 'creativity' seems to be that overcoming which produces the sovereign conscience. Since it would be odd to think of Nietzsche's ideal as merely being creative in this sense, or as merely being a sovereign promise-maker, I think we need to take what we learn from these descriptions to be a bare, formal outline of Nietzsche's ideal. It is an outline formulated specifically to understand Nietzsche's ideal in relation to the ascetic ideal and bad conscience which Nietzsche opposes.

Moreover, the conscience of the creative spirit would naturally inherit the great development of internalization from the long history to which he is an heir. Yet unlike the tamed man's 'bad conscience' and its successor, the ascetic guilty conscience, the creative spirit's conscience is clearly self-affirming. As we have seen, internalization and self-affirmation are precisely the attributes which distinguish the sovereign individual's promise-making from that of the newly tamed man of "five or six 'I will not's.'" Thus, both the sovereign individual and the creative spirit share an internalized conscience and a sense of self-affirmation. The account of the creative spirit explains how these attributes were developed, which is precisely what is left unexplained in the account of the sovereign individual. In turn, the account of the sovereign individual explains how independence, autonomy and a self-constrained conscience are possible, which is precisely what is left unexplained in the account of the creative spirit. Thus, each figures represents a partial perspectives which require the other perspective in order to portray this ethical type as a whole.

This brings us the third argument, which concerns the wider context of Nietzsche's conception of a new, higher ethical type. As we have seen in relation to the 'free spirits' and 'new philosophers', the defining attributes of this type can be grouped together under three descriptions: independence, a revaluation of prevailing values, and a new form of conscience. The sovereign individual is a paragon of independence and has a new form of conscience. Regarding a revaluation of values, Nietzsche tells us that the sovereign individual has been "liberated again from the morality of mores" but says nothing of how this liberation took place or (what amounts to the same thing) how the sovereign individual's conscience developed out of the long history which precedes it. Having traced this history, Nietzsche ends by describing a type of person who is likewise independent[71] and who develops a new form of conscience from the reversal of the ascetic

[71] In addition to describing the creative spirit as strong enough to reverse the ascetic conscience and to stand up to the opposition by societal mores, Nietzsche's describes this figure's "supremely self-confident mischievousness in knowledge" – a phrase which perfectly describes free spirits on the model of Socrates (*GM*:II:24).

conscience, a reversal Nietzsche explicitly ties to the revaluation of values by which nihilism is to be averted. Thus, both the sovereign individual and the creative spirit fit the description of Nietzsche's highest ethical type as this had been presented in earlier works. As I have sought to show, the difference between their descriptions is a matter of emphasis, and this difference in emphasis allows these accounts to explain and clarify each other in important ways.

If these arguments are correct, then there is indeed a single, coherent picture of a higher ethical type emerging in Nietzsche's thought, even if he sometimes views this ethical type from different perspectives and using different labels.[72] We might try to define this type by listing certain virtues (e.g. independence, courage, and perhaps even "conscientiousness,") but other defining traits (e.g. the revaluation of values) do not present themselves as virtues *per se*. Moreover, as we have seen, what distinguishes this type is not so much the particular values he or she upholds or embodies, but the *way* these values are upheld or embodied (with sovereign self-constraint and out of a creative, world-affirming self-affirmation.) This way of relating to values also describes how Nietzsche's higher type will relate to himself or herself, to others, and to existence as a whole: the sovereignty with which one upholds values is a manifestation of one's attitude toward oneself and the world, and this sovereignty with respect to oneself in turn allows a sovereignty in action and with respect to others. As we have discussed in relation to a self-strengthening cycle within this way of life, this sovereignty with respect to oneself and others in the world in turn reinforces the self-affirming attitude toward oneself and actuality. Earlier we defined a 'way of life' as the evaluative basis for one's thinking and acting which defines the way that a person relates to herself, others and the world. It

[72] In works after the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche does not discuss this ideal type at any length, although one passage in particular is worthy of note. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche describes Goethe's ideal of an "emancipated individual" in terms very much like the descriptions of the sovereign individual and other figures representing his own highest ethical type: "Goethe conceived of a strong, highly cultured human being, skilled in all physical accomplishments, who, keeping himself in check and having reverence for himself, dares to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom. . ." (*TI* "Expeditions" 49).

should now be clear that this new, higher ethical 'type' represents a new, higher 'way of life'.

CHAPTER 3 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTION OF DESPAIR

Having completed the first two chapters, I hope an understanding has emerged as to how both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche pursue the ethical question of the best way of life. By 'way of life' Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both mean, roughly, the manifestation of one's highest values in the way one relates to oneself, others, and the world. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche approach ethics by developing a broad typology of different ways of life and exploring the internal strengths or weaknesses of these ways of life. As has become apparent, neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche puts any emphasis on the finality or precision of these typologies. Kierkegaard explores several sub-categories and "borderline" cases within his typology of different ways of life and Nietzsche conceives of a range of possible manifestations and combinations within his typology of different ways of life.

Although there are some similarities in the ideal 'best way of life' illustrated by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (e.g. individuality) and although both have harsh rebukes for both the life of conformist mediocrity and the life of ascetic world-renunciation, I do not mean to suggest any neat parallel between ethical ways of life in these respective typologies. What I hope my explication in the first two chapters has established is that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche share a common approach to ethics, a holistic approach that looks to the value of a 'way of life' as a whole and asks the question of the best way of life. In these chapters, special emphasis was placed on explaining what way of life each respectively takes to be best. It is perhaps natural at this point to want to contrast these answers, to pit Kierkegaard's life of faith against Nietzsche's life of creative sovereignty. Yet it is only when we acknowledge that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are asking the same question that their respective answers to this question come into sharpest contrast. Moreover, the areas of divergence or disagreement between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche cannot be understood until we carefully explore the critiques each thinker supplies against ways of life he considers

inferior; only this will allow us to understand what critiques each thinker can supply against the other's conception of the best way of life.

In the next two chapters I will explain how Kierkegaard and Nietzsche critique certain ways of life on the basis of some notion of internal collapse, what Kierkegaard calls 'despair' (*Fortvivle*) and what Nietzsche calls "nihilism" (*Nihilismus*). I will explore not only the nature of this internal collapse, but also how such a collapse makes possible a transition to another, better way of life. Thus, I will explore what Kierkegaard sometimes calls a 'leap' (*Spring*) but more often a 'metamorphosis' (*Metamorphose*) and what Nietzsche sometimes calls "self-overcoming" (*Selbstaufhebung* or *Selbstüberwindung*) involving a "revaluation of values" (*Umwertung der Werte*).

As I hope to demonstrate, one of the benefits of adopting the ethical project pursued by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is that it yields a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of ethical failures than traditional ethics can offer. I believe their analysis is *deeper* in that instead of just focusing on particular acts of wrongdoing, they explore the failure within one's fundamental stance toward life which gives rise to these actions. It is more *comprehensive* in several ways, but partly in that both thinkers explain why some ways of life that are blameless or even praiseworthy according to traditional ethics are nonetheless failures. In addition, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche offer a deeper understanding of what is most often 'the one thing needful' with respect to ethics, namely the transition to a better way of life.

§1 DESPAIR CONSIDERED IN GENERAL

It may help to introduce this chapter by addressing one obvious objection to the holistic 'way of life' approach to ethics I am advocating. This might be called the 'Moral Monster Objection,' and it may be stated as follows: 'It may seem like an advantage of this 'way of life' ethics that because it takes a broad formal approach, looking at how one relates to one's values *whatever these may be*, this way of doing ethics can appeal to people holding a range of different beliefs

and values. But without more substantial principles for yielding fixed ethical laws and decisive prescriptions for actions, how can this ethics exclude and condemn 'moral monsters' like Adolf Hitler and Charles Manson? It may seem that Hitler is a good candidate for Nietzsche's ideal of the strong, "supra-moral" individual and that Manson is a good candidate for Kierkegaard's ideal of an irrationally obedient 'knight of faith' who stands beyond ethics. But if this approach to ethics is helpless to condemn such men, and may even be used to justify them, how can it constitute an acceptable standard for ethical evaluations?'

The first thing to say in reply to this objection is that the approach to ethics I offer here is not mean to *replace* the more traditional action-centered forms of ethical thinking. I merely submit that in addition to these ways of thinking, ethics should also consider the question of the worth of different ways of life. There are certainly cases in which the formal approach to ethics presented here is not sufficient for grounding ethical judgments we are called upon to make (e.g. in many specific situations in medical ethics). Yet this formal approach is sufficient to address the objection as it stands, since there is more than sufficient content in the ideals presented by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to condemn moral monsters such as Hitler and Manson.

Kierkegaard seems to have anticipated this objection as early as *Fear and Trembling*, where he wonders whether he can discuss Abraham's binding of Isaac without risking that someone will "go off the rails and do likewise" (*FT*:60). His reply is that while it may be easy enough to commit wrongdoings such as murder on the *pretense* of having faith, to actually have faith is quite a different thing: "If one makes faith the main thing – that is, makes it what it is – then I imagine one might dare speak of it without that risk in this day of ours which can hardly be said to outdo itself in faith, and it is only in respect to faith that one achieves resemblance to Abraham, not murder" (*FT*:61). Kierkegaard's best of way of life is to *actually* have faith, not simply the profession of faith, and to actually have faith requires a genuine humility, selfless obedience, and

surpassing love of others not found in the egomaniacal moral monster: "if you simply remove faith as a nix and nought there remains only the raw fact that Abraham was willing to murder Isaac, which is easy enough for anyone without faith to imitate; without faith, that is, which makes it hard" (*FT*:60). Likewise, Nietzsche's best of way of life requires us to be free of *ressentiment*, self-hatred and hatred of others, conditions hardly met by moral monsters such as Hitler and Manson. What is deeply mistaken in the association of Nietzsche with Nazism is not just that it overlooks Nietzsche's frequent and scathing attacks on anti-Semitism and German nationalism, but that it overlooks much of the content that Nietzsche builds into his ideal figure.

Far from being unable to formulate a condemnation of 'moral monsters' such as Adolf Hitler and Charles Manson, I would argue that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can offer an even deeper analysis of the ethical failure in these cases than traditional ethics can. One way of describing what is wrong with the 'moral monster' is that the ethical law has been violated a number of times, where this ethical law is conceived in terms of deontology, utilitarianism, or any other principle. But I think that the deeper problem is the fundamental stance of hatred, resentment, rage, petty self-interest and fear that constitutes the way of life of the moral monster and his followers. Thus, Kierkegaard would condemn a religious fanatic like Manson and his followers in the strongest terms, as representing a demonically defiant form of despair which makes an open mockery of God by simply using the name of God as justification for pursuing one's own dubious ends. Far from the knight of faith's humility, obedience in fear and trembling, and love of others, Manson's religion was one of self-glorification and violent hatred. Likewise, Nietzsche would condemn a political fanatic like Hitler and his followers in the strongest terms, as representing one of the worst manifestations of *ressentiment*, herd-mentality, and nihilism. The "Third Reich" represented the culmination of the rise of German nationalism,

militarism, and anti-Semitism which had already begun in Nietzsche's day and against which he directed his most potent scorn and venom.[73]

While it is true that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can offer powerful critiques of these extreme cases of wrongdoing, their insights are perhaps even more penetrating and valuable when it comes to analyzing ethical failures of a much more common variety. As mentioned above, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche the real challenge for ethical thinking is to be able to recognize and diagnose deeper failures within the everyday life of actual people, even people who might be considered blameless or praiseworthy in the eyes of traditional ethics. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss Kierkegaard's understanding of this failure as despair. In doing so, I will take as my guide *The Sickness Unto Death*, although I will also look at what Judge Wilhelm says about despair in the second volume of *Either/Or*. I will first discuss what Kierkegaard means by despair as a general concept, and then I will look to applications of this concept in particular cases, paying special attention to the despair within the ways of life already discussed in chapter one. Having examined these manifestations of despair, I will discuss in what way despair is understood as "the corridor to faith" (*SUD*:98). Lastly, I will say a few words about how despair is a valuable concept for ethics generally and how it is useful for finding an internal critique of Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms.

By Kierkegaard's own stipulation, Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *The Sickness Unto Death*, writes from the viewpoint of Christian faith (*Papirer* X[1], 517, p332). Thus, in Part II of the book, he gives specifically Christian qualifications to his concept of despair, e.g. as sin 'before God' and as defiance of God. Yet as Anti-Climacus makes clear from the outset, exploring manifestations of despair in order to edify the reader represents "the ethical side of Christianity" (*SUD*:35, cf. also *SUD*:153). Thus, despair is an ethical concept in the broad sense of the term 'ethical' I have been using here (not to be narrowly

[73] For examples, see *HH* I:175, *BGE*:251, *TI* "Germans" 1, *A*:24, *A*:55, *EH* "Books" HH:2.

identified with Judge Wilhelm's 'ethical life'). What despair means for Anti-Climacus is not a feeling of depression or anxiety, but the failure of one's whole way of life. It is the state of internal collapse which exists within a self that misrelates to itself in thought and action, by pretending to be a self that it is not and by avoiding living as the self that it is. Importantly, because the human self is not self-enclosed, this misrelation to oneself is also a misrelation to God, others and existence as a whole.

A good way of introducing this misrelation of despair is by way of a contrast with its opposite, the non-despairing way of relating to oneself that Anti-Climacus calls faith. In his notoriously difficult definition of the human self, Anti-Climacus declares: "The self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation's relating to itself" (*SUD*, 43). For Anti-Climacus, the proper way for a self to relate to itself is to want to be the self that it actually is, which includes living up to the potential within this self to become something excellent. In contrast, a self might relate to itself in one of two fundamental forms of despair: not wanting to be oneself or wanting be another, self-created self that one would prefer to be instead. Anti-Climacus finds these two forms of despair related since a person who tries to create a new self does so in order to avoid being the self he actually is.[74]

Anti-Climacus admits that "if the human self were self-established, there would only be a question of one form [of despair]," the despair of not wanting to be oneself. A self-established self would not be misrelating to itself in wanting to be the self that it creates or establishes, so there could be no question of a despair of wanting to be oneself, what Anti-Climacus calls "defiant despair" (*SUD*:43). But according to Anti-Climacus, the human self is not self-established; it is created and established by a power outside it. For Anti-Climacus this power is God. That the self is not self-established means that in

[74] Anti-Climacus toys with the question of which form of despair is more fundamental, but ends up without a consistent answer to this question (see *SUD*, 44, 50).

relating to itself as the self it actually is, the human self must also relate to this power that established and created it. Anti-Climacus' definition of "the state of the self when despair is completely eradicated," which is also his definition of faith, is the life in which "in relating to itself and in wanting to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it" (*SUD*:44,79).

From what we learned about the life of faith in the first chapter, we know that to be "grounded transparently" in God means to live as one whose life is a gift and a task from God. For Anti-Climacus, one must recognize one's self as that "whose task it is to become itself, which can only be done in the relationship to God" (*SUD*: 59). Presumably, every human self is already "grounded" in God insofar as God created it, but in saying that to be free of despair one must be grounded "transparently" in God, Anti-Climacus indicates that the non-despairing person is aware of this grounding and enacts this awareness in actual life. In contrast, the despairing person relates to himself and wants to be himself in a way that does not relate to God as the power which established him. What is despairing about such a life is not that it lacks a *belief* in God, and in fact many of the forms of despair sketched by Anti-Climacus may involve a belief in God. Rather, despair is always a matter of underestimating or overestimating one's self in relation to God, by avoiding being the self God created (and cares for) or by pretending to be the creator and judge of one's own self.

Thus, for Anti-Climacus despair is always an *internal* problem, a misrelation to one's self, even if it also involves a misrelation to what exists independently of the self (God, and through God, other people and the world at large). Despair can be called the internal *collapse* of a way of life in that a self which avoids itself or pretends to be what it is not is internally divided within itself. This is not just a matter of a divided will, or a division within the self between will and intellect, but rather a fundamental will not to be one's self at all. A life defined by a fundamental evaluative stance in which one is turned against and away from one's actual self represents a continual state of instability and collapse. As we shall see shortly, the despairing self is constantly plagued

by whatever of the self it tries to avoid or falsely presuppose (i.e. by its inability to be rid of itself or to create a new self in order to be rid of its actual self.)

As the title *The Sickness Unto Death* indicates, the central metaphor for despair throughout the work is that of physical sickness. This metaphor is helpful for explaining an important distinction between the collapse and failure of a way of life and the noticeable effects of this failure. As I mentioned above, things like feelings of despair, frustration, anxiety, and depression do not constitute despair strictly speaking. These can be, at most, merely *symptoms* of the disease of despair, and for Anti-Climacus it is important not to confuse the symptoms with the disease. After all, one could be in despair without feeling despair, as is the case with the person whose immersion into conformity, mediocrity or pleasure is successful enough to avoid any such unpleasantness. "Not to be in despair may mean precisely to be in despair," Anti-Climacus warns, "A sense of security and repose may mean that one is in despair; that very security, that very peace, can be despair" (*SUD*:54-5). Equally as worrisome are those who *do* experience feelings of despair, frustration and anxiety, and thus realize that something is wrong in their lives, but who seek to ameliorate only these symptoms without addressing the disease itself. For Anti-Climacus such symptomatic treatments can only perpetuate and intensify the disease of despair. Trying to simply *feel* better about oneself while refusing to actually *become* better or live better simply entrenches oneself further in despair. In fact, as we shall see shortly, several of the types of despair Anti-Climacus sketches are constituted by some way of dealing with the symptoms of despair in a despairing way.

This brings us to a related distinction between despair properly understood and whatever difficulty, frustration, or "stumbling block" a person living a despairing life may encounter. This stumbling block or *scandalon* may involve the feelings of anxiety, despair, or frustration just mentioned, but it is not so much these feelings themselves as what these feelings pertain to: that which one is anxious or frustrated about. For example, Anti-Climacus talks about the person who "despairs over something earthly" such as a financial loss, meaning

that this person is brought to the point of emotional desperation and crisis over this loss (*SUD*:80). Such a person is unlikely to take this feeling itself as the root problem, but he would also be incorrect to think that the cause of his despair is this financial loss. According to Anti-Climacus, that a person is brought to the point of hopeless anxiety over a financial loss indicates that the real despair was present even before this loss occurred. What is really wrong here is not the loss of money or the feelings of despair which followed, but that one had such a stance toward money in the first place.[75]

Simply put, the *scandalon* of a way of life always takes the form of a failure to attain one's highest *telos*, while the despair of this way of life is that one has this as one's highest *telos* in the first place. Anti-Climacus sometimes distinguishes the *scandalon* of a way of life from its despair by talking about despairing *over* something versus despairing *of* something: "One despairs *over* whatever binds one in despair; over one's misfortune, over the earthly, over the loss of one's fortune, etc.; but *of* whatever, rightly understood, releases one from it: of the eternal, of one's salvation, of one's own strength, etc." (*SUD*:92fn). What one despairs *over* is not the real cause of failure in one's life, but *that* one despairs over this particular *scandalon* is a useful indication as to what the real despair and failure of one's life might be.

As much as he relies upon the metaphor of sickness to describe despair, Anti-Climacus is careful to point out some important differences between despair and physical sickness. One difference is that the "sickness unto death" that is despair does not in fact lead to a terminus in death. Rather, despair is a way of living such that one is continually dying in a spiritual sense: "dying in despair transforms itself constantly into a living. The despairer cannot die; no more than 'the dagger can kill thoughts' can despair consume the eternal, the self that is the source" (*SUD*:48). The death of the self may be exactly what one who

[75] As we will see shortly, Anti-Climacus would classify this stance as the "despair of immediacy" in which one undervalues one's deeper spiritual self and puts too much value in things like financial security (cf. *SUD*, 54, 80).

does not want to be himself may hope for, and this makes it all the more frustrating that despair cannot ever succeed in destroying this self. Despair is like the biblical fire which burns without consuming that which it burns; thus it is one more torment and frustration to the despairing person that he "cannot consume himself, cannot be rid of himself, cannot become nothing" (*SUD*:49).

Another difference is that physical sicknesses are most often not the result of a person's own will, and are therefore not the sick person's fault. In contrast, Anti-Climacus is clear that despair is always the result of the will of the despairing person. This is not to say that the person wants to be in despair, but that he has taken a willful stance towards life that simply *is* despair: the stance of wanting not to be himself or of wanting to be the self he creates. Thus, unlike physical sickness despair is never a matter of misfortune. Freedom is an essential condition for despair: "Where then does despair come from? From the relation in which the synthesis relates to itself, from the fact that God, who made man this relation, as it were lets go of it" (*SUD*:46). Although Kierkegaard does not work out any detailed theory of what this freedom might entail, he is clear that each person is at every moment free to relate to him- or herself in despair or in faith. Thus, no one is in despair once-and-for-all; the person who continues to live in despair does so freely: "Every actual moment of despair is to be referred back to its possibility; every moment he despairs he *brings it upon himself*" (*SUD*:47).

In emphasizing the will in relation to despair, Anti-Climacus does not deny that knowledge also plays an important role. We have already seen how despair can be understood as lacking an awareness or "transparency" of one's grounding in God. Indeed, the central typology of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death* differentiates ways of life according to "self-consciousness": consciousness of what one's self actually is, of whether one is in despair, the nature of this despair, etc. (*SUD*:59). But Anti-Climacus refuses to excuse any form of despair on the grounds of complete ignorance of what the self is or of how it ought to relate to itself and the power which established it. In a lengthy discussion on the

"Socratic notion of sin" (sin as ignorance), Anti-Climacus brings up the important issue of self-deception: "sin must really consist in something other than ignorance; it must consist in the activity whereby a person has worked at obscuring his knowledge. [...] What then is the missing component in Socrates' specification of sin? It is: the will, defiance" (*SUD*:120-1). If Socrates insists that we fail to will what is good because we are ignorant of what is good, Anti-Climacus thinks Christianity goes a step further by insisting that we remain ignorant of what is good because of a deeper will to avoid the good: "Christianity goes a little further back and says: 'It is because he won't understand it, and that in turn because he is unwilling to do what is right.'" (*SUD*:127). Anti-Climacus believes that all actual despair involves some degree of self-knowledge and some will to resist knowing this self and being this self (*SUD*:72,78).

Before turning to the typologies of despair illustrated in *The Sickness Unto Death*, one final word on despair as a general concept is in order. In keeping with Kierkegaard's usual stance against comparative evaluations in ethics, Anti-Climacus refuses to categorize some manifestations of despair as objectively "worse" than others. As one comes to have a greater degree of consciousness of the self and its despair, there is less "obscurity which might serve as a mitigating excuse," and a continuation of despair is increasingly a matter of open defiance. Anti-Climacus describes this as the "intensification" of despair: "the level of consciousness intensifies despair. The truer a person's conception of despair, while still remaining in despair, the more clearly conscious he is of being in despair, the more intense the despair" (*SUD*:79). But to say that one form of despair is more "intense" than another is not to say that it is "worse" by any kind of objective standard. Anti-Climacus explains that the person with the least degree of consciousness is to some extent less guilty of open defiance (insofar as his or her ignorance may serve as a "mitigating excuse"), but on the other hand this ignorantly despairing person is "simply one negativity further from the truth and from deliverance" (*SUD*:74). Although less

intense, this ignorant despair "can be the most dangerous form of despair. In his ignorance, the despairer is, though in a way to his own undoing, made safe from becoming aware – which means he is safely in the hands of despair" (*SUD*:75).

§2 TYPES OF DESPAIR

Interestingly, Anti-Climacus offers more than one typology of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*. As mentioned above, the typology of despair he offers as decisive differentiates ways of life according to the agent's degree of "consciousness, that is to say, self-consciousness" (*SUD*:59). But Anti-Climacus also offers a typology of despair according to what he calls the "the factors which constitute the self as a synthesis": infinitude/finitude and possibility/necessity (*SUD*:59). It is worth discussing this other typology briefly, as it further illustrates an important idea discussed above. We have said that the life of faith is a life in which one relates to one's self as gift and task from God and that this task of the self is, most broadly, "to become itself." (This is Kierkegaard's version of Pindar's call to '*become what you are*', which is also a central ideal for Nietzsche.) Anti-Climacus clarifies that "[t]o become oneself, however, is to become something concrete. But to become something concrete is neither to become finite nor to become infinite, for that which is to become concrete is indeed a synthesis" (*SUD*:59).

"Infinitude" is what Anti-Climacus calls "the expanding factor" in the self, and it seems to mean an abstraction in which one conceives of the human self in its most abstract and generalized form. "Finitude," by contrast," is "the confining factor" of the self and it seems to mean one's factual existence as a particular person. To become "concrete" is to become a synthesis of these factors, which means one relates to oneself according to both the abstract possibilities and the factual realities of one's life. One can be in despair by overemphasizing either of these factors at the expense of the other. A person who overestimates her infinitude at the expense of finitude becomes "fantastic." Anti-Climacus gives the example of the person who becomes "emotionally

fantastic," meaning that this person's emotions are directed toward entirely abstract and fantastical entities. This person "becomes an abstract sensitivity which inhumanly belongs to no human, but which inhumanly participates sensitively, so to speak, in the fate of some abstraction, for example, humanity *in abstracto*" (*SUD*:61). At the other extreme, someone who overestimates her finitude at the expense of infinitude suffers from "despairing confinement, narrowness" and "finds it much easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, along with the crowd" (*SUD*:64).

While the factors of finitude and infinitude help to explain what it is to become a self that is concrete, the factors of possibility and necessity help to explain this process of becoming oneself: "For the purposes of becoming (and the self must become itself freely) possibility and necessity are equally essential" (*SUD*:65). Anti-Climacus says of the self that "although it is indeed itself, it has to become itself. To the extent that it is itself, it is necessary; and to the extent that it must become itself, it is a possibility" (*SUD*:66). Actual freedom is not just the openness of one's possibilities, but the enacted balance or synthesis of these possibilities within the necessities of one's life. Put another way, enacting one's freedom in actuality always means finding the synthesis of one's possibilities (what one can potentially become) and one's necessity (what in one's self is fixed or given). Anti-Climacus defines actuality, personhood, and freedom all in the same way, as the proper balance of possibility and necessity (*SUD*:59,66,70).[76]

Once again, despair can take the form of overemphasizing either factor at the expense of the other. In one case, one ignores one's necessity in a pretentious overestimation of one's possibility, with the result that nothing ever becomes actualized: "possibility seems greater and greater to the self; more and more becomes possible because nothing becomes actual" (*SUD*:66). Anti-Climacus analyzes this way of life to be missing "the strength to obey, to yield to

[76] "The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical element in the categories of possibility and necessity," "actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity," "Personhood is a synthesis of possibility and necessity" (*SUD*:59,66,70).

the necessary in one's self, what might be called one's limits" (*SUD*:66-7). In the other case, one underestimates one's possibilities with the result that the self becomes stifled and stymied. In this category Anti-Climacus discusses the "petty bourgeois" who is "devoid of imagination," or a "fatalist" who feels trapped or suffocated in the necessities of his life. Importantly for Anti-Climacus, the self's "possibilities" are not just possibility of what one can accomplish for oneself, but also the possibilities that are opened to the self by God, since "for God everything is possible" (*SUD*:68). As we shall see, for Kierkegaard an important part of 'becoming oneself' is to go beyond what is possible by oneself alone (i.e. beyond self-reliance).

The typology of despair according to the factors of the self helps to clarify what it means for the self to have the task of becoming itself and how it may fail in this task. It also establishes a pattern that can be seen in the typology of despair according to consciousness, namely that what the despairing self tends to stumble over in life is brought about either by the presence of whatever of its self it despairingly tries to avoid, or by the absence of whatever of its self it despairingly pretends to have. In contrast to the typology according to the "factors" of the self, the more "decisive" typology takes into account the different levels of intensity in the different forms of despair. For Anti-Climacus, despair considered under the aspect of consciousness can take three broad forms, depending on the level of self-consciousness of the agent: the despair of ignorance, the despair of weakness, and the despair of defiance. (As discussed earlier, each increase in self-consciousness corresponds to an increase in the intensity of despair, so these three forms also indicate a progression of the intensity of despair). It is within this typology that we find Kierkegaard's analysis of the failure of the ways of life discussed in the first chapter.

Anti-Climacus leading his reader down through the levels of despair reminds one of the guided descent through the levels of hell in the Dante's *Inferno*, and this is a useful analogy for understanding the tour of different forms of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*. In the *Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard

expresses admiration for Dante as a poet who does not neglect "ethical judgment," and it fair to say this is an ideal he himself aspires to in works like *The Sickness Unto Death* (CA:153). Both writers present us with a vividly imaginative typology of different ways of being a sinner and the consequences of these sins. Like Dante, Kierkegaard writes from a devout religious stance, but both writers also avail themselves of much humor and irony in portraying these forms of sin. (It may also be fair to say that neither writer is above settling personal vendettas *in absentia* within these works, e.g. against the clergy.)[77]

Dante's hierarchy of sinners in hell ranges from those who are ignorant of or indifferent to the demands of faith to those who are most directly and treacherously defiant of God. Likewise, Anti-Climacus' hierarchy of despair (which for him is the same as sin) ranges from naïve ignorance to outright defiance. Dante and Kierkegaard are both also interested in the dialectical relation between a person's sin and the 'fruit' of this sin. The punishments Dante depicts for each type of sinner in hell matches the sin being punished according to what Dante calls *contrapasso* ("fit punishment").[78] *Contrapasso* is the system of equivalent punishments, the justice of the *lex talionis* ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth") in which the punishment is a grotesque exaggeration or inversion of the corresponding sin. Thus, for example, the lustful are punished by being blown about in all directions by a unceasing wind. Those who were hypocrites must wear heavy cloaks which are brightly gilded on the outside but dull grey lead on the inside. Likewise, those who sowed divisive advice in life are punished by being hewn apart in hell.

On one hand, these punishments may seem to represent precisely the criticism Kierkegaard often gives of the Middle Ages: that it loses sight of

[77] For example, see *SUD*:150 and *Inferno* Canto XIX, and XXIII.
[78] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Transl. Robert Hollander, (Random House: New York, 2000) [XXVIII.142]. The term *contrapasso* traces back to Aquinas' commentary on Aristotles *Nicomachean Ethics* 1132b in which the Latin *contrapassum* is used to translate the Greek *antipeponthos* ("reciprocity," "suffering in return for one's action"). For a discussions of the concept of *contrapasso*, see commentary by Hollander, esp. p.55-6, 486, and Singleton, p. 522-523. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Transl. Singleton, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). Vol. I.2.

inwardness by trying to manifest it outwardly. But what Dante gives his readers in *Inferno* is not an outward expression of something that should be inward, but a poetic expression which, among other things, constitutes a meditation on the inner nature of human sin. Thus, one of the things that makes Dante's poetic portrayals of these punishments so interesting is what they say about the sins being punished. Specifically, we can learn something about how Dante conceives of a sinner as misrelating to himself, to others, or to God through this sin. Here we see Dante and Kierkegaard pursuing very similar projects. For Kierkegaard sin is always a misrelation of this kind; his challenge is to express this inward misrelation in words, which he often does through poetic imagery.

One obvious difference between these writers is that for Dante these punishments take place only after one's life has ended. By contrast, Kierkegaard shows the spiritlessness, torment, or stumbling block within the lived experience of the sinner. Another difference is that for Kierkegaard this stumbling block or torment is not really the *punishment* for the deeper sin of despair; rather it a symptom of this despair, its outward eruption which is brought about by the underlying sickness of despair. Unlike the relation between Dante's sins and their punishment, there is no external form of justice or "fit punishment" at work here: the punishment, if there is one, is simply to be in despair, to have a despairing misrelation to God and to oneself. For Kierkegaard, despair is an *organic* failure, a misrelation within the organism of the self in which a fundamental sickness manifests itself in experienced difficulties and problems in life.[79] Despair is a form of hell within the person who despairs; it is quite literally a 'living hell' for the one who despairs. Yet there is neither divine justice nor 'poetic justice' at work behind the presence of the stumbling block in one's life; it follows from despair as a symptom follows from a disease.

Like Dante (and some of his humanistic medieval contemporaries), Kierkegaard faces the problem of how to judge the Greek and Roman pagans,

[79] One might say that there is no notion of justice at all within this organic conception of ethical failure, but of course for Plato justice within the individual is precisely an organic failure of this kind.

especially the "virtuous pagans," in relation to the Christian notion of sin. This is a delicate question because of the love and respect these writers have for their heroes of antiquity, and because many of these heroes predated the historical figure of Jesus and thus had no possibility of living the life of Christian faith. Just as Dante reserves a place for the virtuous pagans in the first and most benign level of hell, Anti-Climacus reserves the first and most benign level of despair for what he calls the "spiritlessness" of paganism (*SUD*:72). Anti-Climacus says that we might even be tempted to exempt this form of despair from any blame, since in purely "human terms" it may be considered "a state which in a kind of innocence does not even know that it is despair" (*SUD*:72). Anti-Climacus explains that the same spiritless "paganism" exists in Christendom, even by those who profess to be Christians. But he credits the pagans of antiquity with an orientation toward spirit that the spiritless of Christendom lack; he insists that "there is and remains" a "difference in kind between paganism in the stricter sense and paganism in Christendom," namely that "although paganism lacks spirit, it is pointed in the direction of spirit, while paganism in Christendom lacks spirit in the opposite direction, away from it or in a defection, and is therefore in the strictest sense spiritlessness" (*SUD*:77).

Anti-Climacus considers pagan spiritlessness and Christian spiritlessness two manifestations of the despair he calls the despair of ignorance, the "despair which is ignorant of being despair, or the despairing ignorance of having a self and an eternal self" (*SUD*: 73). While we may doubt the fairness of this charge against all 'pagans,' it is worth trying to understand what exactly Anti-Climacus means in claiming that the pagans and many in Christendom are "spiritless" and despairingly "ignorant of having a self."[80] He elaborates that this ignorance is to be found in every "human existence not conscious of itself as spirit, or not personally conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence which

[80] These passages seem to imply that all "pagans" suffered this form of despair, yet it is unclear how Socrates, who is referred to positively in this same section, might fit into this category. Moreover, Kierkegaard associates the Stoics with a later form of despair.

is not grounded transparently in God, but opaquely rests or merges in some abstract universal (state, nation, etc.)" (*SUD*:76). This ignorance of selfhood is to be found not just in these mistaken theoretical self-conceptions, but also in any self that is "in the dark about itself, simply takes its capacities to be natural powers, unconscious in a deeper sense of where it has them from, takes its self to be an unaccountable something" (*SUD*:76).

Despairing ignorance is a self-conception which refuses to acknowledge the self's grounding in God. Lacking this "transparency," one "opaquely" conceives of one's self as merging into the abstraction of the state or *polis*, or one simply takes oneself to be an "unaccountable," naturally occurring *something*. There are indications that it is some form of the aesthetic way of life that Anti-Climacus has in mind here.[81] For example, he admits that the pagans also had a conception of despair and spiritlessness, but he argues that "the aesthetic conception of spiritlessness in no way provides the criterion for judging what is despair and what is not [...] since it is impossible to specify aesthetically what spirit truly is. How could you expect the aesthetic individual to answer a question which for him simply does not exist!" (*SUD*:76). Anti-Climacus also describes the life of despairing ignorance in a way that matches well with what we learned about the life of the immediate aesthete: "He is totally dominated by his sensuous and psycho-sensuous reactions; he lives in the categories of the sensate, the pleasant and the unpleasant, poo-poos spirit, the truth, etc.; he is too sensate to have the courage to risk and endure being spirit" (*SUD*:73).

In the main, however, the despair of the aesthetic way of life finds its fullest expression in the next level of despair to be discussed, what Anti-Climacus calls the despair of weakness. The despair of weakness is "in despair not wanting to be oneself" (*SUD*:80). Here one is to some degree conscious of

[81] Alternately, this despair may apply to those who have not even progressed as far as the aesthetic life. A hint that this pre-aesthetic way of life might exist is found in Judge Wilhelm's discussion of people of "quiet lostness": "so many live out their lives in quiet lostness [...] they live, as it were, away from themselves and vanish like shadows" (*EO* I:168) These people "do not live aesthetically, but neither has the ethical become manifest to them in its wholeness; nor have they actually rejected it" (*EO* I:168-9).

one's self and conscious that one is in despair, even if one has only a "dim idea" of what this despair is (or of what the self is 'as spirit', 'before God', etc.).[82] This despairer tends to misdiagnose his despair: as discussed earlier, he mistakes the *scandalon* of his life for the despair itself. Under the heading "Despair over the earthly or over something earthly" we find the despair of "pure immediacy" and the despair of "immediacy with some degree of reflection." As these labels suggest, it is here that we find the despair of the immediate and reflective aesthetic ways of life we discussed in chapter one. Like Judge Wilhelm, Anti-Climacus insists on grouping both the conformist petty bourgeoisie and the refined "aesthete" together in what is called the immediate or the aesthetic way of life. (*EO* II:180)

In some ways the despair of the immediate person resembles the despair of ignorance discussed above. Just as the despairingly ignorant person "lives in the categories of the sensate, the pleasant and the unpleasant," Anti-Climacus says that the "dialectic" of the immediate way of life is: "the pleasant and the unpleasant; its concepts: good fortune, misfortune, fate" (*SUD*:73,82). The difference between these two forms of despair is that the immediate person runs up against some stumbling block such that he becomes to some degree conscious of being in despair: "Now something happens to this immediate self; it runs up against something (or something runs up against it) which brings it to despair. [...] That which for the immediate person is his whole life or, provided he has a modicum of reflection, that part of it to which he is peculiarly attached, is snatched away from him by 'a stroke of fate'" (*SUD*:82). The immediate aesthete has tried to make his self "something included in the scope of the temporal and worldly" and has tried to live in "immediate continuity" with the world in the mode of "desiring, craving, enjoying, etc." (*SUD*:81). But he now finds that he

[82] Although Anti-Climacus uses the distinction between conscious and ignorant despair as a broad typological tool, he also indicates that every person has some degree of self-conciousness and some degree of ignorance about his or her despair: "Actual life is too complex to turn up contrasts as abstract as that between a despair that is completely ignorant of being in despair and one that is completely conscious of being so. One must assume that in most cases the state of the despairer is one of having only a dim idea, though again with countless nuances, of what that state is" (*SUD*:78).

cannot have whatever he most desires or enjoys, and he considers this loss his despair: "through a strange tergiversation and total mystification concerning himself, he calls it despair. But to despair is to lose the eternal – and of this loss he says nothing, he doesn't dream of it. To lose the earthly is not in itself to despair, and yet that is what he speaks of and he calls it despair" (*SUD*:82).

In taking the satisfaction of his earthly desires as that in which his "whole life" or "peculiar attachment" lies, the immediate person despairingly misrelates to himself, avoiding anything more deeply spiritual in his self and treating this self as something entirely in the domain of the worldly and temporal. As Anti-Climacus explains, this person treats his self as if it were his coat, something purely external (*SUD*:84). On one hand this constitutes 'not wanting to be oneself,' not wanting to be the spiritual self one actually is, even if it is also true that this self "presents only an illusory appearance of having anything eternal in it" (*SUD*:81). *Prima facie*, this may seem like a contradiction. How can someone be faulted for not wanting to be his actual spiritual or eternal self if his self in fact lacks anything spiritual or eternal in it? The key to resolving this conflict is to remember what we said before about human actuality as a synthesis of possibility and necessity. For Kierkegaard, what a self actually is includes what it potentially can become. Thus, a self that currently lacks the spiritual in itself can also be classified as not wanting to be its actual, spiritual self. Potentially and thus in *actuality* there is always something spiritual and eternal about the self 'before God,' as Anti-Climacus reminds us: "next to God there is nothing so eternal as a self" (*SUD*:84). But Anti-Climacus also suggests that the immediate aesthete has effectively lost the "eternal" in himself by currently relating to himself as something without anything eternal in it, by *being* a self-relation that excludes the eternal: "Immediacy really has no self" (*SUD*:83). Exclusion is, of course, also a way of relating to what is eternal or spiritual within oneself; specifically, it is a way of turning against and away from anything potentially spiritual in one's self.

This misrelation to oneself is the immediate person's despair, but it is also the source of the *scandalon* over which the immediate person stumbles. It is precisely because he tries to live in "immediate continuity" with the worldly and temporal that the immediate person is vulnerable to every change of fortune. What this person invests in worldly pursuits is not just money, time, etc., but his whole self, and so he cannot avoid despairing as a whole self over whatever losses and changes of fortune life in the world inevitably brings. He has sought to dissolve himself in immediate continuity with the world, but he thereby deprives himself of the distance or detachment from worldly fortune necessary to face misfortune without completely despairing. Moreover, when bad luck inevitably happens, the immediate person understands this stumbling block only according to the despairing aesthetic categories: he blames the world for being boring, disappointing, or painful instead of blaming himself for attaching himself to enjoyment as his highest value. The despairing immediate person does not take this stumbling block for what it is, a symptom of the deeper despair of making earthly desires and enjoyment one's "whole life" or central "attachment" in life.

Anti-Climacus sketches some possible paths that now lay open to the immediate person facing such a stumbling block. If there is some change in external circumstances such that his desire is fulfilled after all, then he continues as before, at least until he hits another stumbling block: "he begins where he left off, he neither was nor became a self but now carries on living, merely in the category of the immediate" (*SUD*:83). If there is no such change, he may give up his "peculiar attachment" to whatever special enjoyments he had hoped to get from the world and instead settle for life as a conformist: "He now acquires a modicum of understanding of life; he learns to imitate other people, how they conduct their lives, and proceeds to live as they do" (*SUD*:83). (Alternately, one might think, the despairer may take up a different "peculiar attachment" in the manner of the 'crop rotation' method discussed in Chapter 1). Anti-Climacus explains that this life of conformity also involves the despair of not wanting to be

oneself, specifically in the mode of wanting to be someone else: "When immediacy despairs, it has not even enough self to wish or dream that it had become what it has not become. The immediate person helps himself in another way: he wishes he were someone else" (*SUD*:83). This wish is, of course, a fantasy. Anti-Climacus explains that "immediacy really has no self; it doesn't know itself and so cannot recognize itself either, and therefore usually it ends in fantasy" (*SUD*:83).[83]

Another path open to the despairing aesthetic person is to try to find the necessary detachment from worldly fortune in his own reflection, i.e. to live a reflective aesthetic life. In chapter one, we discussed the reflective aesthete's strategy of escaping any vulnerability to the contingencies of chance and fortune by taking possession of himself reflectively. Anti-Climacus explains that the despair here lies once again in the fact that the self does not want to be its actual self. The self is not pure reflection, nor does it become its actual, spiritual self by reflecting on its immediacy. The move toward reflective enjoyment represents an attempt to escape from, rather than deal responsibly with, the factual realities of one's life. The despair here lies in the fact that this person fails to relate to himself as something eternal or spiritual:

> He has no consciousness of a self that is won by infinite abstraction from all externality. This self, naked and abstract, in contrast to the fully clothed self of immediacy, is the first form of the infinite self and the progressive impulse in the entire process through which a self infinitely takes possession of its actual self along with its difficulties and advantages. (*SUD*:86)

The reflective immediate person remains more dependent upon his immediacy (and thus changes of fortune) than he pretends to be. Herein lies the despair of this way of life, but also its stumbling block:

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[83] Comparing this despairing fantasy to the "fantastic" despair discussed earlier (the despairing lack of the self's necessity) yields an interesting shift in Anti-Climacus' dialectics (cf. *SUD*:67). Earlier the fantastic person was described as refusing to "yield to the necessary in one's self." Now the fantastic person is accused of overemphasizing necessity to the loss of possibility (cf. *SUD*:71).

> With this certain degree of reflection begins that act of separation in which the self becomes aware of itself as essentially different from the environment and the external world and their effect on it. But only to a certain degree. If the self which has some degree of reflection in itself now wants to take possession of the self, it may stumble upon one difficulty or another in the composition of the self, in the self's necessity. For just as no human body is perfect, so neither is any self. Whatever this difficulty is, he recoils from it. Or something happens to him that infringes on the immediacy in him more profoundly than in reflection. Or his imagination lights on some possibility which, if it came about, would then become that break with immediacy (*SUD*:85).

The person who wants to take possession of himself in the mode of reflective enjoyment still treats his factual self as source of entertainment rather than as something spiritual 'before God': the "difficulty he has stumbled on requires a complete break with immediacy, and he does not have the self-reflection or the ethical reflection for that" (*SUD*:85-6). Anti-Climacus says that this person treats his self as if it were a place of residence which he finds untenable for some reason: he leaves it, but returns to it again and again to see if the problem has happened to pass: "Until that time he comes only now and then, as though on a visit to himself, to find out whether the change has occurred" (*SUD*:86).

Once again, Climacus discusses several paths open to the person confronted with the stumbling block of this way of life. As always, one may react to this stumbling block as a symptom of despair, treating it as a prompt toward the inwardness of faith, relating to it as part of "the progressive impulse in the entire process through which a self infinitely takes possession of its actual self" (*SUD*:86). Alternately, one may react to this *scandalon* passively, that is to say *despairingly*, in a number of ways, depending on whether or not the *scandalon* happens to pass on its own. If this does happen, the person may begin where he left off: the reflective aesthete "'is himself once more', as he puts it, though this simply means he begins where he left off; he was a self up to a point and went no further" (*SUD*:86). If the stumbling block does not pass on its own, this person may turn "completely away from the inward direction, the path he should have

followed in order truly to become a self" and instead throw himself into worldly wisdom and worldly pursuits: "He takes possession of what, in his language, he calls his self, that is to say, whatever aptitudes, talent, etc. he may have been given, all this he takes possession of but in the outward direction of what is called 'life', real life, active life" (*SUD*:86).

In other words, the introverted person who fails to secure enjoyment by reflecting on his immediacy may instead become an extrovert, adopting the reflective standpoint of worldly wisdom and trying to forget any realization of his inner despair:

> He deals very warily with the modicum of reflection he has in himself, lest this thing in the background [i.e., his despair] comes up again. Then gradually he manages to forget it. In the course of the years he comes to think of it as well-nigh ridiculous, especially when in the congenial company of other capable men with a sense and aptitude for real life (*SUD*:87).

Anti-Climacus finds it typical of this approach that despair is considered a mere phase of youth, not something that those concerned with 'real life' worry about. This treats despair as if getting out of despair were something that just naturally happens to self over time. While this view accords with 'worldly wisdom,' Anti-Climacus insists that "it is extremely foolish, and shows lack of insight into what spirit is – as well as failure to appreciate that man is spirit and not just an animal" (*SUD*:89). Specifically, he thinks it is foolish "to suppose it should really be such an easy affair with faith and wisdom that they just arrive over the years as a matter of course, like teeth, a beard and that sort of thing" (*SUD*:89).

For Anti-Climacus, both forms of the aesthetic life relate to the despair of this life *passively*, as something which happens to the self and which may or may not happen to go away. Anti-Climacus sees this passivity as a form of weakness, and this explains why both manifestations of the aesthetic life are classified as "the despair of weakness." As usual, Anti-Climacus adds the

qualification that no absolute difference exists between this passive level of despair and the active level of despair Anti-Climacus calls "defiant despair": "the opposition is only relative; no despair is entirely without defiance, indeed defiance is implicit in the very formulation: *not* wanting to be; while, on the other hand, some weakness is to be found even in despair's most extreme defiance" (*SUD*:80).

Under the heading "despair of weakness", Anti-Climacus also discusses the despair "of the eternal or over oneself" in which the despairer becomes aware of the weakness of being so attached to earthly enjoyment, but now despairs over this weakness: "The despairer himself understands that it is weakness to be so touchy about the earthly, that it is weakness to despair" (*SUD*:93). Although this realization is an important step toward overcoming this despair, it is not sufficient, since one can simply despair over one's weakness instead of humbling asking for God's help in getting rid of it: "instead of now definitely turning away from despair in the direction of faith, humbling himself before God under his weakness, he engrosses himself further in despair and despairs over his weakness" (*SUD*:93). This is what Anti-Climacus calls the life of "reserve" or "enclosedness" (*Indesluttethed*). Here the person despairs over the fact that he "could have been so weak as to attach such great significance to the earthly" and so now he withdraws entirely into himself: "our despairer then maintains sufficient reserve to keep every trespasser, that is, everyone, away from this matter of the self, while outwardly he is every bit a 'real person'." (*SUD*:95) For reasons to be explained later, we will defer further analysis of this form of despair until after our discussion of the next form of despair, that of the active ethical life.

Rather than avoiding his actual self passively, the ethical person strives to take active control over his self on the strength of his own self-reliance. The main pseudonymous advocate for this active ethical life is, of course, Judge Wilhelm. Yet we should bear in mind that just as the aesthete A represented only one kind of aesthetic life (the reflective aesthetic "poet-existence"), Judge Wilhelm

represents just one manifestation of the active ethical life. Anti-Climacus' analysis of the despair of 'active defiance' applies to not only Judge Wilhelm's peculiarly existential ethical life, but also the life lived according to more traditional (e.g. Kantian/Hegelian) forms of ethics from which Judge Wilhelm wants to distinguish his version of the ethical life (*EO* II:254).[84] Within the active ethical life we might find the life of commitment to some particular cause or task, the life of commitment to duty (whether deontological, utilitarian, etc.), and Judge Wilhelm's life of commitment to self-development. What these ways of life have in common is that they all hold the active attainment of ethical well-being (however this is conceived) as the highest *telos*. More importantly they all emphasize the need to attain this highest *telos* self-reliantly, as a matter of self-responsibility, autonomy and "sovereignty over oneself."

What could be wrong with striving for ethical goodness on the strength of one's own self-responsibility? For Kierkegaard, what is wrong with this stance only becomes apparent when we consider what taking responsibility for oneself, including one's past, inevitably entails: admitting guilt for at least some past wrongdoings. The decisive failure and the true despair of every such active ethical way of life is that it cannot deny guilt, or pretend that guilt is not important, but neither can it alleviate guilt. Thus, any ethics of self-reliance stumbles over its inability to deal with the issue of ethical failure effectively. Anti-Climacus explains that this is because one cannot deal with ethical failure without coming to the need for forgiveness, and forgiveness lies outside and beyond the realm of self-reliance.

Yet we should also bear in mind that much of what Judge Wilhelm says about the best life and the despair of other ways of life is correct, at least if we take Anti-Climacus as our guide. Like Anti-Climacus, Judge Wilhelm finds that the failure of the aesthetic life is not the *scandalon* of pain or boredom, but the

[84] The Judge distinguishes both the aesthetic life and his form of the ethical life from "another life-view that places the meaning of life in living for the performance of duties" where these duties are defined by "a multiplicity of particular rules" (*EO* II:254).

underlying evaluative stance of taking enjoyment as one's highest *telos*. The Judge calls this failure "despair" and understands by this term not only the collapse of this way of life as a whole, but also the potential corridor toward a better way of life, a joyful life free of despair (cf. *EO* II:221-222,228-9). Thus, for the most part it can be said that Judge Wilhelm understands what despair is and that the aesthetic way of life is one of despair. However, he misses the fact that the active ethical life of self-reliance that he advocates is also one of despair.

Nonetheless, there is a central point of disagreement between Anti-Climacus and Judge Wilhelm about what despair is and why the aesthetic life is a life of despair. In this difference we find a good introduction to the despair of the active ethical life. For Judge Wilhelm the despair of the aesthetic life is that it bases the meaning of life on something beyond and outside of the self, i.e. beyond the domain of self-reliance. The aesthetic life fails because the attainment of its highest *telos* (enjoyment, pleasure, good fortune) does not lie within one's own control (*EO* II:180). In fact, the Judge reads a lack of self-reliance into the very definition of despair: "every life-view that has a condition outside itself is despair" (*EO* II:235). It is precisely on this point that the Judge and Anti-Climacus disagree. For Anti-Climacus the life of faith has its 'condition' outside of itself and beyond the domain of self-reliance, but it is not a life of despair. To the contrary, it is the ethical life that is a life of despair, and it is so precisely because of the ethical person's unwillingness to surrender his sovereignty over himself.

Judge Wilhelm claims that anyone who takes possession of himself in ethical responsibility attains an "inner security" and becomes "infinitely secure within himself" (*EO* II:255). This is because the attainment of the ethical person's goal (ethical well-being, the fulfillment of commitments, etc.) is always within the power of his own will. Unlike the aesthetic person, who can only *wish* that he will get enjoyment or good fortune from the outside, the ethical person always finds within his own willpower the ability to attain his goals and the significance of his life. As the Judge remarks, "the art is not to wish but to will"

(*EO* II:252). By holding fast to himself and refusing to surrender sovereignty over himself, the ethical person can supposedly triumph over any situation: "The person who lives ethically always has a way out when everything goes against him; when the darkness of the storm clouds so envelops him that his neighbor cannot see him, he still has not perished, there is always a point to which he holds fast, and that point is – himself" (*EO* II:253). Judge Wilhelm suggests that one can find significance in one's life through one's own will since the "person who lives ethically knows that what counts is what one sees in each situation, and the energy with which he considers it" (*EO* II;252).

But Anti-Climacus suspects that this "inner security" is in fact a deep insecurity, and that merely self-imposed significance always collapses into insignificance: "the despairing self is content with taking notice of itself, which is meant to bestow infinite interest and significance on its enterprises, and which is exactly what makes them experiments" (*SUD*:100). The actively defiant person wants to use his freedom "to rule over himself, or create himself, make this self the self he wants to be, determine what he will have and what he will not have in his concrete self" (*SUD*, 99). The most likely *scandalon* of this life, according to Anti-Climacus, is that this person stumbles upon the limits of his ability to rule over or create himself. One thereby fails to have the self that one wants to have: "Perhaps, while taking his bearings provisionally from the concrete self, an experimenting self of this kind, who wants in despair to be himself, stumbles upon some difficulty or another, something the Christian would call a cross, a basic fault, whatever that may be" (*SUD*:101). As always, one common response to a *scandalon* in life is to try to ignore it: "The negative self, the infinite form of the self, may begin by altogether rejecting this, pretending that it is not there, having nothing to do with it" (*SUD*:101).

Judge Wilhelm does not exactly ignore this sort of difficulty, but neither does he accept it for what it is, as a stumbling block to his self-reliant way of life that cannot be self-reliantly eliminated. He admits that one can make mistakes or find oneself in situations beyond one's control, but he insists that the ethical

person can still deal with these situations self-reliantly: "if he detects that he has made a mistake, if obstacles are raised that are beyond his control, he does not lose heart, for he does not surrender sovereignty over himself. He promptly sees his task and therefore is in action without delay" (*EO* II:252). But what possible tasks can a person put into effect in response to a situation that is beyond his control? Moreover, if a person has made a mistake (especially an ethical mistake) what possible actions or tasks will rectify this mistake? (As we discussed above, one can get into a state of guilt self-reliantly, but there is nothing one can do to get out of guilt self-reliantly.)

For Anti-Climacus, the project of creating oneself can only be fleeting and illusory since whatever freedom and strength of will is applied to create oneself is also available to scrap this project and start over again: "The negative form of the self exerts the loosening as much as the binding power; it can, at any moment, start quite arbitrarily all over again and, however far an idea is pursued in practice, the entire action is contained within a hypothesis" (*SUD*, 100-1). Here we find a central weakness in the notion of self-reliantly upheld commitment: it seems that if that which binds you to a commitment is nothing more than your own willpower, then at every moment this same willpower may be used as a 'loosening' power to abandon this commitment (e.g., if one changes one's mind). One can just as easily break as keep a commitment held only by one's own self-reliant self-vigilance and willpower. For this reason, Anti-Climacus thinks that the self-reliant self "is constantly relating to itself only experimentally, no matter what it undertakes, however great, however amazing and with whatever perseverance" (*SUD*, 100). Anti-Climacus sees it as a central problem with this attempt at self-mastery that the self acknowledges no power higher than its own decision-making sovereignty: "It recognizes no power over itself; therefore in the final instance it lacks seriousness and can only conjure forth the appearance of seriousness, even when it bestows upon its experiments its greatest possible attention" (*SUD*, 100).

A similar challenge to the notion of sovereign autonomy can be found in Kierkegaard's journals. Criticizing Kant's notion of an autonomous person who "bound himself under the law which he gave himself," Kierkegaard states: "In a deeper sense that means to say: lawlessness or experimentation. It is no harder than the thwacks which Sancho Panza applied to his own bottom. I can no more be really stricter in A than I am, or than I wish myself to be in B. There must be some compulsion, if it is to be a serious matter."[85] As a result of this internal weakness within the life of self-reliance, Anti-Climacus asserts that the attempt to master or create oneself is only a "fictional" building project in which the self is "forever building only castles in the air" since within "the whole dialectic in which it acts there is nothing firm, that is eternally firm" (*SUD*:100). Anti-Climacus even refers specifically to the notion of self-mastery and 'sovereignty' over oneself as the crux of this despair:

> The self is its own master, absolutely (as one says) its own master; and exactly this is despair, but also what it regards as its pleasure and joy. But it is easy on closer examination to see that this absolute ruler is a king without a country, that really he rules over nothing; his position, his kingdom, his sovereignty, are subject to the dialectic that rebellion is legitimate at any moment. (*SUD*:100)

What Anti-Climacus presents here is a powerful critique of self-reliance and the possibility of sovereignty. This critique applies both to one's ability to shape and create oneself and one's ability to remain committed to particular projects and promises. (As we shall in discuss a later chapter, this is one of the most direct and powerful challenges to Nietzsche's life of the sovereign individual.) Yet we have not yet fully addressed the despair that underlies this *scandalon* of the failure of sovereignty.[86] Moreover, if what is said here is to apply to Judge Wilhelm and the life he advocates, much more will need to be

[85] *Journals*, no. 1041, trans. Drew.
[86] I think it is important to note that even if one's attempts at autonomous self-control and self-formation were successful, Anti-Climacus would still consider this life to be one of despair. The despair lies in wanting to be one's own creator, and this remains whether or not one stumbles upon some *scandalon* in trying to be this self-created self.

said, since the Judge insists quite emphatically that his life of self-sovereignty should not be confused with an attempt at self-creation (*EO II*:215, 217, 258, 260, 332). In order to see how the Judge's life of self-reliant self-responsibility is also an attempt at self-creation, we will need to confront the deeper failure within this way of life.

In Anti-Climacus's analysis, the despair of active defiance matches closely with the despairing lack of finitude discussed above.[87] He states: "In order to want in despair to be oneself, there must be consciousness of an infinite self. However, this infinite self is really only the most abstract form of the self, the most abstract possibility of the self. And it is this self the despairer wants to be, severing the self from any relation to the power which has established it" (*SUD*:99). Wanting to be one's actual self would involve accepting one's finite factual existence along with one's freedom to attain new possibilities. The person of active defiance wants to be only a freely choosing self, while eschewing his finite, factual existence.

As suggested earlier, one of the intended targets of this critique seems to be Kantian ethics. Anti-Climacus would presumably condemn as despair Kant's insistence that we identify ourselves with our purely rational 'noumenal' selves. Aside from the question of whether or not we can ever succeed in acting as a purely rational self, there is the deeper question of whether we *ought* to try to be our purely rational, "disinterested" self to the exclusion of our physical, "interested," socially-embedded, particular self. For Anti-Climacus, the attempt is itself a matter of despair, whether it succeeds or not. It represents a misrelation to one's actual self in that one avoids being one's actual self in wanting to be just that part of the self one wants to be.

But what about his finite self does Judge Wilhelm, or his ethical hero, not want to be? Unlike Kant, the Judge believes in an ethics that embraces the full breadth of a person's finitude. But there is one aspect of his finitude that the

[87] Although the two typologies of despair overlap at points such as this one, in general there is no neat correlation between the two.

Judge does not squarely face as a matter of finitude, namely his guilt. It is not that the Judge pretends to be free of guilt, but rather that he treats his guilt as something within the domain of his freedom (something he can deal with self-reliantly, as a 'task') rather than as something firmly in the domain of his finitude (and beyond his own powers to eliminate). True, in committing the act of wrongdoing the agent acts freely, and thus he becomes responsible for the free commission of this act. But thereafter the guilt of this wrongdoing is no longer within the domain of a person's freedom. Judge Wilhelm believes that one can take possession of oneself ethically, by assuming responsibility for one's whole life, and can thereby reside in the "inner security" of a self-reliant life. But as we mentioned in the first chapter, the more one takes the notion of responsibility seriously, including responsibility for one's past, the more one comes to understand that one is guilty of at least some past actions and is therefore guilty *per se* (guilty in the qualitative sense Climacus discusses).[88]

The ethical life strives for ethical goodness and promises this goodness to anyone who genuinely takes responsibility for his or her life. But it thereby sows the seeds of its own internal collapse, since accepting this responsibility means accepting oneself as ethically guilty rather than ethically good. Having brought one to the realization of guilt, ethics can do no more, since it lies beyond the power of ethics to annul this guilt. (Taking responsibility for guilt does not thereby annul it, nor does any amount of good deeds in the present and future.) Therefore, anyone who takes his ethical goodness seriously, as the highest *telos*, inevitably finds that he has already failed according to this very criterion. This is the internal collapse of the ethical life.[89]

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[88] Although Nietzsche wants to abolish the notion of guilt proposed here, he is also sensitive to the problem of an intractable past for the project of creating oneself: "'It was': that is what the will's teeth-gnashing and most lonely affliction is called. Powerless against that which has been done, the will is an angry spectator of all things past" (Z:2 "Of Redemption").

[89] It seems that for Kierkegaard as well as Nietzsche, the ethical life is a kind of trap: it seems to promise goodness, but instead always issues a guilty verdict. As we will discuss in the final two chapters, the difference between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on this point is that Kierkegaard takes this guilt seriously, as an actuality, and seeks redemption from it in the Christian notion of forgiveness. In contrast Nietzsche considers this guilt to be merely a psychological sickness, one promoted by the (Pauline) Christian notion of forgiveness, and Nietzsche seeks redemption from it in the self-overcoming of the ascetic instincts and

Moreover, by insisting on self-reliance, the ethical person refuses what Kierkegaard finds to be the only possible solution to this failure of the ethical life: forgiveness. Judge Wilhelm admits that he is guilty, but he seems to assume that one can simply repent and then gain one's life back again happily without ever having to leave the safe confines of self-reliance. Yet between repentance and the joyful life must come forgiveness, and forgiveness cannot come from oneself. Forgiveness must always be help from the outside, and this means that accepting forgiveness must mean surrendering precisely that "sovereignty over oneself" that Judge Wilhelm refuses to surrender. This is why Johannes de Silentio believes that any "ethics that ignores sin is an altogether futile discipline, but once it postulates sin it has *eo ipso* gone beyond itself" (*FT*:124) As discussed in the first chapter, in a footnote Johannes de Silentio explains that: "once sin makes its appearance ethics comes to grief precisely on the question of repentance. Repentance is the highest ethical expression but for that very reason the most profound ethical self-contradiction" (*FT*: 124fn). Self-reliant action can lead one into a state of guilt and, at most, to the repentance of this guilt. Beyond this one cannot go on one's own. Genuine repentance exhausts the whole domain of self-reliance and still leaves the self in a state of guilt. Thus, the domain of self-reliant ethics contains its problem (ethical failure), but it does not contain the solution to this problem (forgiveness).[90] Repentance is the highest that ethical self-reliance can attain, but in genuinely repenting one admits the limitations and failure of what can be achieved self-reliantly; it is in this sense that repentance is a "profound self-contradiction" for ethics. In order to gain the joyful life the Judge imagines on the other side of repentance, one must surrender sovereignty over oneself in asking for help.

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ideals. Both treat guilt as a central problem requiring a radical "redemption" but they strongly disagree on the nature of this guilt and what its redemption entails.

[90] The basis of the "inner security" of the ethical life was supposed to be the defensive wall of self-reliance that is constructed around the self. Ironically, these efforts only intensify the crisis for the ethical person, since they only serve to shut in the problem while shutting out the solution to this problem.

Another aspect of the despair of the active ethical life is self-deception. The Judge wants the entire matter of his own ethical status to be within his control, and he begins by wanting to be judge over himself. Oddly, Judge Wilhelm addresses the obvious worry here, self-deception, even within his proposal to judge himself. He accuses the aesthete of self-deception, but thinks he has found a self-reliant way of preventing it in his own life:

> I am not ignorant of how deceitful one's own heart is, how easy it is to deceive oneself [...]. So when I have encountered something in life, when I have decided on something that I was afraid would take on another aspect for me in the course of time, when I have done something I was afraid I would interpret differently in the course of time, I often wrote down briefly and clearly what it was that I wanted or what it was that I had done and why. Then when I felt that I needed it, when my decision of my action was not as vivid to me, I would take out my charter and *judge myself* (*EO* II:197, my emphasis).

The claim to effectively rule out self-deception by taking careful note of oneself is patently absurd, since it ignores the fact that there may be self-deception even in this act of self-vigilance.[91] Self-reliant self-vigilance would require a transparency about one's self that the Judge admits is impossible: "no human being can become transparent to himself" (*EO* II:190). Yet what is truly despairing and *defiant* in this claim is the presumption that one *could* be the judge of oneself, that one could keep the entire matter of one's ethical status entirely within the sphere of one's own judgment.

Here we see the full extent to which Judge Wilhelm's ethical life involves self-creation. Judge Wilhelm acknowledges that the self does not create itself *ex nihilo*, that it is not self-established in this sense. But in the life he advocates, taking possession of this given self on the basis of self-reliant self-responsibility entails that one tries to close the loop of self-relation that is the self. In living the active ethical life, one wants to be one's self, not as one's actual self

[91] Self-deception seems to be the only explanation for how the genuine admission of guilt Judge Wilhelm claims for the ethical life is also consistent with the sense of self-secured, "inner security and serenity" that the Judge also claims for the ethical life.

(i.e. including a relation to God) but as a closed loop, a self-sufficient, self-enclosed entity. In relating to oneself, one wants to relate *only* to oneself; one does not want to relate to God. Specifically, the ethical self does not want to relate to God with respect to that which the ethical person holds to be within his domain of self-reliance, i.e. his ethical status.

But for Anti-Climacus ethical status is always something one has 'before God,' since part of what it means that the self is 'established by God' as a free self is that God continues to be both judge and redeemer with respect to one's ethical status. Even an ethical person who takes his guilt very seriously, as Judge Wilhelm appears to do, still fails to face the full import of this guilt: that it is 'before God,' that it is in some sense *against* God. Also, such a person does not acknowledge that this stance against and away from God is a stance against and away from one's actual self, since one's actual self is not a self-established, self-enclosed entity. Here we see how the person who wants to be a self-reliant, autonomous self in fact attempts to create a self that he is not (while avoiding the self that he actually is.)

The last way of life to discuss in relation to its despair is what I have broadly called "the life of resignation." This includes the life of *Fear and Trembling's* 'knight of resignation' and the life of "renunciation," "suffering," and "the totality of guilt-consciousness" described by Climacus in the *Postscript* as 'religiousness A' in contrast to Christianity, "religiousness B" (*PS*:559). In *Fear and Trembling* this stance of resignation is considered without respect to the issue of guilt; there, this resignation was not a repentance for guilt but a renunciation of the earthly and temporal. What is called "resignation" in *Fear and Trembling* corresponds to the "renunciation" part of religiousness A. Climacus' further discussion of 'religiousness A' reveals what the stance of resignation entails in relation to the issue of guilt. One might say that the "renunciation" and "suffering" of religiousness A are resignation with respect to earthly things and the "guilt-consciousness" of this life is resignation with respect to guilt. What defines what I have called "the life of resignation" is an overall existential stance

in which one admits some fault, whether earthly or moral, but one insists on resigning oneself to this fault, refusing all help in order to cling to self-reliance and the supposedly secure domain of 'sovereignty over oneself'.

There is a proper place for both forms of resignation (renunciation and repentance) in the life of faith, but only when this initial step of renunciation is coupled with an openness to external help in which one surrenders self-reliance. Thus, Kierkegaard's critique is not aimed at resignation or repentance *per se*, but rather at the *life* of resignation or repentance in which these become central and are not coupled with an openness to outside help. Those living the life of resignation take up the task of repentance or resignation as another form of self-reliant achievement, rather than as the furthest expression and exhaustion of self-reliance. If we compare the active ethical life with the "ethico-religious" life of resignation, we see a continuation of a familiar pattern: within a level of despair, one form of despair tries to ignore this despair while another tries to deal with the despair according to the despairing categories. As explained in chapter one, I think we can understand both the active ethical person and the resigned person as living different forms of "the ethical life," broadly construed, in that they both uphold self-reliance (what Climacus calls the domain of 'the immanent') as the central stance defining their lives. But whereas the active ethical person tries to ignore the despair of this life, the person of resignation attempts to deal with this despair of self-reliance without abandoning self-reliance. Just as the immediate person despaired by having enjoyment as his "peculiar" attachment and "that which for the immediate person is his whole life," the person of resignation despairs by wanting repentance or resignation to be his whole life. In contrast, the person of faith repents and resigns himself infinitely, but he has his life in the grateful joy of forgiveness and loving trust in God. The person of faith has his central 'condition' outside himself, in what God can provide, not within himself in what he can self-reliantly achieve. Most fundamentally, the life of resignation is a life of resigned refusal of help, and this is what distinguishes it from resignation as it occurs within the life of faith.

Kierkegaard works out this contrast in detail in discourses such as *The Woman Who Was a Sinner* and *Two Discourses at Communion on Friday*. Here Kierkegaard discusses the despairing sorrow over one's sins and the kind of sorrow over sins that is integral to faith: one in which the highest telos is always finding forgiveness (WA:150-1). He associates self-torment with Judas and makes clear that neither "self-torment" nor "passionate self-accusation" bring one closer to God or are pleasing to God. They are instead sinfully presumptuous in that they imply that one can *do something* with regard to finding forgiveness (WA:155-6). In *The Sickness Unto Death*, the despair of this life of resignation is discussed in a cluster of related forms of despair.[92]

Anti-Climacus explores different manifestations of the stance of resigned refusal of help. Like his pseudonymous predecessors, he differentiates these forms of refusal according to whether this help consists of aid with some earthly difficulty or the forgiveness of sins. With respect to the former, he discusses the despair of "reserve" or "self-enclosedness" (*Indesluttethed*) mentioned above, the despair of "resignation," and the despair of "passive defiance." In the second part of the book, which deals specifically with the issue of despair as sin, we find parallel manifestations of despair as they are applied to the issue of sin, e.g. "despairing of forgiveness" and "despairing over one's sin."

In general, these ways of rejecting help can come in three forms: out of a pretense that you don't need help, out of a prideful refusal to accept help, and out of a spiteful demand not to be helped. The person resigned to earthly difficulties pretends not to need help with these difficulties just as the person who despairs of forgiveness pretends not to need forgiveness. The person of despairing self-enclosedness holds against himself his weakness in being

[92] One possible explanation for why the discussion of this form of despair is so extensive and appears in so many places throughout *The Sickness Unto Death* is that this is precisely the form of despair Kierkegaard finds within himself. We know from his journals that he was struggling with his "reserve" and that he was searching for an understanding of forgiveness that was not simply a relapse back into "resignation" (cf. *Journals* trans. Hannay, 11 May 48 VIII I A 649). So *The Sickness Unto Death* can be read as an extended confession on his part. Yet, being Kierkegaard, he feels the need to urge a confession from everyone else as well. As we will discuss at the end of this chapter, Kierkegaard's thinking here provides a useful internal critique that can be applied to his own works when he does in fact relapse back into resignation.

attached to earthly things just as the person who despairs over his sins holds his sins against himself, presumptuously refusing divine forgiveness because he refuses to forgive himself. The person of passive defiance spitefully clings to his "basic fault" or earthly difficulty, and refuses help. As this spite intensifies into hatred of existence, it becomes "demonic despair."[93] Likewise, as despair over one's sin intensifies it also become more and more "demonic" in its refusal of forgiveness. In what follows we will attempt to trace the connections between the forms of despair Anti-Climacus sketches in these various discussions.

In a footnote to the passage on passive defiance, Anti-Climacus backtracks a little and discusses resignation as a form of despair that is between defiance and weakness. As we have just mentioned, there is a proper place for resignation as part of a life of faith, when resignation includes a surrender of self-reliance and an openness to outside help. But when one refuses to go beyond resignation out of a reluctance to surrender self-reliance, this constitutes a form of despair. Anti-Climacus points out that "much in the world that glories in the name of resignation is a kind of despair: the despair of wanting in despair to be one's abstract self" (*SUD*:102fn). Specifically, one wants to be an abstract self that has "in the eternal everything one needs, thus being able to defy or ignore suffering in the earthly and temporal" (102fn). One tries to avoid one's suffering by "consoling oneself with the fact that this thing may disappear in eternity and so feeling justified in not taking it on in time. Although the self suffers under it [whatever it is], the self does not want to admit that it belongs to the self, that is, will not in faith humble itself under it" (102fn).

Like the despair of active defiance, this form of despair matches the despairing lack of finitude discussed previously in that one attempts to flee into an abstraction in order to avoid being one's actual, finite self. The difference between despairing resignation and despairing active defiance is that in resignation one at least does not pretend to have already dealt with the problem

[93] Kierkegaard uses the term "demonic" in slightly different ways throughout his works, but in general it means a conscious, willed refusal or avoidance of what one knows to be good.

facing the self. The resigned person does not pretend to able to include the problem in his domain of self-reliance; rather, he pretends to be able to exclude the problem from the whole domain of his self. Thus Anti-Climacus places resignation somewhere between the forms of despair of wanting to be oneself and the forms of despair of not wanting to be oneself: "Resignation, considered as despair, is thus essentially different from wanting in despair not to be itself, for it wants in despair to be itself, though with the exception of one thing, in respect of which in despair it does not want to be itself" (*SUD*:102fn).

A parallel flight into abstraction can be found with respect to guilt. In his discussion of those who "despair of forgiveness," Anti-Climacus discusses those who reject the notion of forgiveness because they identify themselves with some abstraction in which the notion of sin is excluded. This can happen either out of conformist identification with the abstraction of "the crowd" or through reflective detachment in which one identifies oneself with some abstract idea of the "generation" or the human race as a whole. Most common are those who "merge in what Aristotle terms the animal category – the crowd" in order to avoid their actual self in this "abstraction" (*SUD*:151). Anti-Climacus thinks this abstraction of 'the crowd' excludes any real notion of sin because we are each sinners as individuals 'before God.' When faced directly, the doctrine of sin "the doctrine that you and I are sinners" singles each person out as an individual and "unconditionally splits up 'the crowd'" (*SUD*:154). But Anti-Climacus finds that most people refuse to be split off from the crowd in this way. A despairing person of this kind does not reject forgiveness because he finds himself innocent as an individual person, but because he refuses to be an individual altogether.

This resistance to the individuation of Christianity is part of what Anti-Climacus calls "offense," a concept that he develops in this section and then at length in *Practice in Christianity*. This offended refusal of individuation is something Anti-Climacus finds at the very heart of Christendom: "the real situation of Christendom is despair of the forgiveness of sins. But this has to be grasped in the sense that Christendom is so far behind that its situation is not

even apparent to it. People have not even arrived at the consciousness of sin" (*SUD*:150). With the help of abstractions, people who refuse to face their guilt as individuals even come to interpret their complacent sense of security as consciousness of the forgiveness of their sins: "they go on to imagine that this security is – yes, it cannot be otherwise in Christendom – that it is consciousness of the forgiveness of sins, a belief which receives every encouragement from the priest" (*SUD*:150). Likewise, Anti-Climacus finds that the abstraction of 'the crowd' leads those in Christendom to appropriate the Christian doctrine of the God-man in a despairing way:

> Once people are allowed to merge in what Aristotle terms the animal category – the crowd, then this abstraction [i.e. the crowd] (instead of being less than nothing, less than the least significant individual human being) becomes regarded as some thing. And then it isn't long before this abstraction becomes God. And then *philosophice,* the doctrine of the God-man comes true. (*SUD*:151)

Without exculpating those whose conformist desires to merge with 'the crowd' avoid and distort Christianity in this way, Anti-Climacus also blames intellectuals who propagate such abstractions: "Understandably, many of the philosophers who were involved in propagating this doctrine of the superiority of the generation over the individual turn away in disgust when their teaching has sunk to the level where the mob is the God-man" (*SUD*:151). Nonetheless, Anti-Climacus insists that the despair is the same whether it is the elite intelligensia or the crowd who distorts and avoids Christianity through these abstractions: "But these philosophers forget that this nonetheless is their teaching, that it was not more true when accepted in the best circles, when the elite of the best circles, or a select circle of philosophers, was the incarnation" (*SUD*:151).

Another form this offense against Christianity can take, whether in the abstract thought of an intellectual elite or in the worldly wisdom of 'the crowd', is the direct rejection of the *concept* of the forgiveness of sins. Anti-Climacus admits that this concept is the most paradoxical thought possible (*SUD*:132). He therefore finds it understandable that those who cling to worldly wisdom or rational ethical philosophy reject this concept, but he insists that this is nonetheless what is demanded of the individual Christian: "it requires an equally remarkable spiritlessness not to be offended by the very idea that sin can be forgiven. For a human understanding that is the most impossible thing of all – not that I should extol the inability to believe it as a mark of genius, for it *shall* be believed" (*SUD*:149). Many try to avoid this command by clinging to the abstractions of rational ethical thought or worldly wisdom, i.e. by clinging to self-reliance in matters of thought. Here Anti-Climacus finds defiance beginning to manifest itself: "When the sinner despairs of the forgiveness of sins, it is almost as though he were directly putting pressure on God. There is something almost of the dialogue in this, 'No, there's no forgiveness of sins, it's an impossibility.' It has the appearance of a brawl" (*SUD*:147). Anti-Climacus later states: "Despair of the forgiveness of sins is a definite position directly opposed to an offer of divine compassion; sin is now not wholly in retreat, not merely defensive" (*SUD*:158).

As this defiance increases, it moves toward what Anti-Climacus calls 'the demonic', which is the most conscious and therefore the most open defiance of God's help. But before reaching this point, the despairing self may instead want to close itself up with its sin or earthly difficulty out of judgmental anger or spite against itself (rather than out of the spiteful hatred against God and all of existence that marks the demonic.) This approach we find in the stance of "reserve" or "enclosedness" already discussed, in which a person holds it against himself that he could be so attached to earthly things and now withdraws entirely into himself. Anti-Climacus says of this person: "As a father disinherits a son, the self will not acknowledge itself after it has been so weak. Despairingly

it is unable to forget that weakness; somehow it hates itself, it will not humble itself in faith under its weakness in order to win itself back" (*SUD*:93). This person 'hates himself' out of a self-righteous judgment of himself, but he will not "humble himself" by surrendering this power to judge and condemn himself. At the heart of this seemingly laudable sternness with oneself, Anti-Climacus finds a despairing form of pride: "as if it was not pride that put such immense emphasis on the weakness, as though it wasn't because he wanted to be proud of his own self that he found this consciousness of his own weakness unbearable" (*SUD*:96).

In what Anti-Climacus calls "despair over one's sins" we find a parallel stance with respect to guilt. Here one holds one's sins against oneself and refuses forgiveness out of a self-righteous insistence on the right to judge and condemn oneself. Just as reserve was an insistence on being shut in within oneself in self-judgment, despair over sin is an insistence on being shut in within oneself with one's guilt, even to the point of rejecting the 'good' of forgiveness: "it wants to listen only to itself, to have to do only with itself, be shut in with itself, yes, place itself inside one enclosure more and by despairing over sin protect against every assault or aspiration of the good" (*SUD*:142). Anti-Climacus notes that "it is supposed to be the sign of a deep nature which therefore takes its sin so much to heart," but in reality it represents a dangerous slide deeper into sin and despair:

> No, this despair over sin, and especially the more it rages in the passionate expression that (as he least expects) betrays him in saying never will he 'forgive' himself for having thus sinned (for this way of talking is close to being the opposite of a contrite heart that prays to God for forgiveness) – this, his despair over sin, very far from being a specification of the good, is a heightened specification of sin, the intensity of which is a deeper absorption of sin. (*SUD*:144)

As with reserve, Anti-Climacus finds it a matter of "hidden self-love and pride" that one clings to self-judgment and self-righteousness by insisting on the right to judge oneself (*SUD*:145). Just as there is a close connection between reserve and 'the demonic' (*SUD*:98), Anti-Climacus finds that this self-enclosed stance of penitence requires "utmost powers of the demonic " and involves a "demonic withdrawal into itself": "It is a step forward, a heightening of the demonic, and of course a deeper absorption in sin. It is an attempt to give to sin some backbone and engagement as a power by its being now for ever decided to hear nothing of repentance, nothing of grace" (*SUD*:142,3). This rejection of genuine repentance and the possibility of grace (forgiveness) can even be found in one who does not presumptuously pretend to judge himself. Anti-Climacus discusses the person who sinks into the "darkest melancholy" over his sins but who "does not say, 'I can never forgive myself' (as though he had perhaps previously forgiven himself for his sins – a blasphemy); no, he says that God can never forgive him his sin" (*SUD*:145). Anti-Climacus finds this person "still more deceptive in his talk" since he pretends to open himself to God's judgment, but in reality he only accepts the judgment he wants to have. What is despairing in the "despair over one's sin" remains the same: a repentance that closes itself off to forgiveness and thereby defies God's help out of a despairing sense of pride and self-righteousness.

As this "heightening of the demonic" continues, this self-righteous pride gives way to a resentful spite. Unlike resignation, what Anti-Climacus calls the despair of "passive defiance" does not involve wanting to be an abstract self located safely beyond this 'basic fault'. Nor does the person of passive defiance reject help out of a misplaced sense of righteous self-severity. Rather, the person of passive defiance wants *out of spite* to keep his faults as an inextricable part of himself: "he wants to spite or defy all existence and be himself with it, take it along with him, almost flying in the face of his agony" (*SUD*:102). This person acknowledges the problem and does not pretend to be able to remove it by

himself, but he still wants to have sovereignty over himself and over the problem by insisting that it remain a part of himself. Anti-Climacus explains:

> [N]ot being willing to have hope in the possibility of the removal of an earthly need, a temporal cross, is also a form of despair. That is what the despairer who wants in despair to be himself is not willing to do. If he is convinced (whether it is really the case or his suffering only makes it seem to be so) that this thorn in the flesh gnaws too deeply for him to be able to abstract from it, then he wants, as it were, to take eternal possession of it. It offends him, or rather, he uses it as an excuse to take offense at all existence (*SUD*: 101-2)

In comparison with the person who wants to be himself in active defiance, the passively defiant person has a higher degree of consciousness about what his self is, especially about its faults. But he still considers the whole matter of these faults to be something within his own domain of self-reliance. Instead of the overly optimistic dream of self-reliant success we found in the active ethical life, we now find the bitterly cynical resignation to failure. Instead of the hopeful pretense of being a flawless self, we now have the spiteful demand to be one's flawed self. There is still a pretentious attempt at self-creation here, in that one claims for oneself the ability to have the self one prefers. But the stance of spiteful resentment and "offense at all existence" marks a much darker and more twisted form of 'wanting to be oneself.'

What is fundamentally *defiant* in this stance is that one refuses to ask for help and to have hope of help.[94] This person is resigned to a life of suffering under this fault and he has committed himself to this fate even to the point of refusing help: "Have hope in the possibility of help, especially on the strength of the absurd, that for God everything is possible? No, that he will not. And ask help of any other? No, that for all the world he will not do; if it came to that, he

[94] In condemning the stance of spiteful resentment against existence, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are in agreement, even if the basis of this condemnation is quite different in each case. As we will see in the next chapter, Nietzsche understands such resentment to be much more widespread than Kierkegaard does. In the fifth chapter, we will explain how one central critique Nietzsche can levy against Kierkegaard's life of faith is that it still represents a form of resentment, despite Kierkegaard's attempts to differentiate faith from resentment.

would rather be himself with all the torments of hell than ask for help" (*SUD*: 102).

It may seem unclear or even psychologically untenable that a person who was suffering would refuse to help in relieving this suffering, but Anti-Climacus points out that this is sometimes nonetheless the case: "And to tell the truth, it is by no means so true, as is said, that is self-evident that a sufferer will ask for help as long as someone can help him" (*SUD*:102). One explanation for why a sufferer would refuse help is that this help may not come in the form that he wants it have. Anti-Climacus notes that "someone suffering has usually one or more ways in which he could wish to be helped," but often the help one gets (or the help one really needs) does not match with the help one would prefer to have (*SUD*:102). As we have seen, someone suffering from a stumbling block does not want to abandon the despairing pursuit of his highest *telos*, but desires only that the stumbling block removed such that he can continue to pursue this *telos*. Even if the despairing person who wants to control what he will have in his self opens himself up to outside help, he still insists on controlling the kind of help he gets. In other words, he wants to continue to cling to self-reliance even in asking for help. The metaphor of physical sickness helps to illustrate this point: someone suffering from painful symptoms may go to a doctor hoping the doctor will simply alleviate the painful symptoms, but often the help the doctor has to offer involves an increase of pain and suffering in order to cure the patient of the underlying disease. Opening oneself up to the help of others involves accepting a kind of vulnerability and lack of control that someone who lives for self-reliance may fiercely resist. Another reason a sufferer might refuse help is a kind of pride which does not want to humble itself in asking for and receiving this help:

> especially when the help is to come from a superior, or the most exalted of all – then comes this humiliation of having to receive unconditional help, in whatever form, of becoming like a nothing in the hands of the 'helper' for whom everything is possible, or even just of having to give in

to some other person, to give up being oneself as long as one is asking for help" (*SUD*:103).[95]

What is offensive to the proudly self-reliant person is the need to accept help from the outside and to accept this help in whatever form it comes, rather than as he would have it.[96] This person finds significance in being able to suffer alone, without the need of help, and would therefore much rather continue to suffer than surrender sovereignty over himself: "Indeed, there is much, even prolonged and agonizing suffering in this way of which the self does not complain, and which it therefore fundamentally prefers so as to retain the right to be itself" (*SUD*:103).

As this spiteful self-enclosure intensifies into outright hatred of existence, we find the final "heightening of the demonic." Demonic despair is not so much a new form of despair as the terminus in a progression toward more and more conscious defiance. We have already explained the "heightening of the demonic" in relation to despairing over one's sin. Anti-Climacus also discusses demonic despair with respect to earthly faults and difficulties, as the demonic extreme of passive defiance:

> It usually beings like this: A self which in despair wants to be himself, suffers some kind of pain which cannot be removed or separated from his concrete self. He then heaps upon this torment all his passion, which then becomes a demonic rage. If it should now happen that God in heaven and all the angels were to offer to help him to be rid of this torment – no, he does not want that, now it is too late. Once he would gladly have given everything to be rid of this agony, but he was kept waiting, and now all that's past; he prefers to rage against everything and be the one whom the whole world, all existence, has wronged, the one for whom it is especially important to ensure that he has his agony

[95] In this passage and in the passage preceding it Anti-Climacus alludes to the possibility that this "help" can come from other people as well as God. Broadly speaking, it seems that the fundamental stance of defiance as self-reliant refusal of help could be a refusal of human or divine help, whether this help be 'aid' in temporal matters or forgiveness of ethical failings. Although this may not be compatible with Kierkegaard's specifically Christian outlook (cf. *SUD*:155), philosophically it is interesting and valuable to consider the broader applications of this idea.

[96] Nietzsche examines this same psychological phenomenon of humiliation from the other side, discussing the power relations between the one who pities and the one pitied, e.g. in *The Gay Science* §13.

> on hand, so that no one will take it from him – for then he would not be able to convince others and himself that he is right. (*SUD*:103)

We see here a new form of self-righteousness. It is not the self-deceiving self-righteousness of active defiance, but neither is it the self-condemning self-righteousness that we discussed earlier in relation to "reserve" and "despairing over one's sins." Here the person wants to be 'in the right' as one who all of existence has wronged. He sees his rage and hatred against existence as justified, and he avoids external help because this would deprive him of what he considers his moral superiority over others and over the whole world: "he is afraid in case it should take away from him what, from a demonic viewpoint, gives him infinite superiority over other people, what, from the demonic viewpoint, is his right to be who he is" (*SUD*:103). Rather than hating and condemning himself in presumptuous self-judgment, this person presumes to judge the worth of existence *in toto.* Specifically, he wants condemn the whole of existence out of resentment against his flawed self: "Rebelling against all existence, it thinks it has acquired evidence against existence, against its goodness. The despairer thinks that he himself is this evidence. And it is this that he wants to be; this is the reason he wants to be himself, to be himself in his agony, so as to protest with this agony against all existence" (*SUD*:105). Here we see in what way this form of despair is a way of wanting to be oneself: this demonic self "wants to be itself in hatred toward existence" (*SUD*:105).[97]

The attempt to secure self-righteousness in the life of resignation fares no better than the attempt to do so in the active ethical life. Refusal of outside help, which is meant to be the strength of the self-reliant approach to life, instead becomes its downfall. Most problematically, the problem of guilt that 'shipwrecked' Judge Wilhelm's active ethical life remains unsolved in the ethico-religious life of resignation. In fact, it is intensified and exacerbated in the refusal of forgiveness. The structure of internal collapse within the active ethical life

[97] This resentment and condemnation of existence as a whole matches quite closely with what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*.

(that holding self-reliantly achieved ethical goodness as the highest *telos* only reveals an ethical guilt that one cannot self-reliantly annul) is repeated and intensified in the life of resignation. Here one strives for a different kind of self-reliantly achieved goodness – the goodness of repenting fully. But in clinging to this self-reliance one in fact *fails* to repent fully, since true repentance includes a surrender of self-reliance and an openness to forgiveness.[98]

§3 DESPAIR AS A 'CORRIDOR TO FAITH'

Having discussed the despairing 'internal collapse' of these different ways of life, we are now in a position to discuss the more positive aspect of despair: despair as part of a transition to a better way of life, what Anti-Climacus calls despair as a "corridor to faith" (*SUD*:98). One of the most mysterious things within all of Kierkegaard's thought is how a person can make a transition out of a despairing way of life and into a way of life free of despair. This transition is what Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms call a "metamorphosis," a "transfiguration," or (as is commonly ascribed) a "leap." Some things about this transition simply cannot be explained theoretically; as we've seen, the life beyond despair is a life beyond self-reliance in both action and thought. Importantly, one cannot be convinced to abandon a despairing stance toward life through arguments; one must be convinced by the failures within one's own life to abandon this stance. Perhaps all that can be said about Kierkegaard's mysterious notion of a transition to a better way of life is something about how despair can prepare the way for its opposite.

Yet such a transition is also one of the most important things to consider, since for Kierkegaard a transition or "metamorphosis" out of despair is the most important thing, the 'one thing needful' for any actual person. (The really pressing question confronting any actual person is not 'what is the nature of my

[98] This conception of a true repentance within faith that is coupled by a grateful and joyful acceptance of forgiveness, in contrast to a resigned repentance which does not open itself to forgiveness, is the central idea in Kierkegaard's 1850 *An Upbuilding Discourse* "The Woman Who Was a Sinner" (*WA*:145-160).

despair?' but 'how do I get out of despair?') Part of what makes such a transition mysterious is that it would need to involve a fundamental change both of one's highest values and the way one relates to these values. But how could such a fundamental change take place? What could convince someone to abandon something she holds as her highest value, as that in which she 'has her whole life'? It may seem that this sort of fundamental evaluative shift is simply an impossibility.

It is in response to this quandary that an understanding of despair as a path out of despair becomes so important. In order to become free of despair the collapsing power of despair must be utilized to break down the despairing evaluative stance, thereby beginning a transition to a better way of life. Both Judge Wilhelm and Anti-Climacus are in agreement about this possibility and its importance. Anti-Climacus talks about the possibility of a "despair which is the corridor to faith" and indicates that the person of faith is always "saved through having been in despair" (*SUD*: 98, 54, 57). Judge Wilhelm discusses a "metamorphosis" or "transfiguration" made possible by despair and declares that "despair is a person's true salvation" (*EO* II:221). Although Anti-Climacus declares at the beginning of *The Sickness Unto Death* that this work will deal solely with despair as the sickness within the self, not as the remedy for this sickness, he insists that we keep this positive role of despair in mind: "That there is this dialectical aspect (even if this work only treats despair as a sickness) must never be forgotten; it is implicit in despair's being also the first element in faith" (*SUD*:36, 149fn). The "dialectical aspect" of despair is that it can be both something extremely negative (the entire collapse of one's way of life) and something positive (an opportunity for a transition to better way of life). Despite disclaimers that *The Sickness Unto Death* treats despair only as a sickness and not a cure, the book contains several interesting indications of what this positive role of despair might be like. By looking at these passages together with what Judge Wilhelm says on the subject, we can get a rough idea of how despair makes possible a metamorphosis to a life free of despair.

Anti-Climacus and Judge Wilhelm both claim that such a transition out of despair utilizes despair as a necessary condition. Anti-Climacus says that "the self is only healthy and free from despair when, *precisely by having despaired*, it is grounded transparently in God" (*SUD*:60, my emphasis). He also says that the "infinite gain" of becoming transparent to oneself as a self 'before God' "is never come by except through despair" (*SUD*:57). Judge Wilhelm declares that those who do not despair "have no presentiment of a metamorphosis" and thus "any human being who has not tasted the bitterness of despair has fallen short of the meaning of life" (*EO* II:190,208). But both Anti-Climacus and Judge Wilhelm also emphasize that the mere presence of despair is not sufficient for this metamorphosis to take place. A way of life that is already inwardly collapsing must be torn down *completely* in order for a new way of life to be able to emerge.[99] This can only be done through despair, but a "half-hearted" or partial despair will not suffice to bring a person out of despair. As Judge Wilhelm warns, "it is a matter of how he despairs" (*EO* II:221).

We have seen many cases in which a person simply resides in a despairing life, ignoring or misunderstanding this despair. Alternately, as we have seen in the case of reflective immediacy and despairing resignation, a person may have a good idea of the despair of a way of life but may try to deal with it without abandoning the despairing way of life altogether. Thus, Judge Wilhelm says of the reflective aesthetic life that it is "the result of a despair that was not carried through, the result of the soul's continuing to quake in despair and of the spirit's inability to achieve its true transfiguration" (*EO* II:210). Likewise, Anti-Climacus criticizes the life of resignation for refusing to abandon self-reliance; he insists that "for repentance to emerge, a person must first despair with a vengeance, despair to the full, so that the life of spirit can break through from the ground up" (*SUD*:90-1). Judge Wilhelm labels these cases of "despair over a particular"

[99] As we will discuss in the next chapter, Nietzsche makes a similar point with respect to values in talking about the need to 'push what is already falling.'

or "finite despair" in contrast to what he calls "authentic despair"[100]: "if I will my despair in a finite sense, then I damage my soul, for then my innermost being does not attain the breakthrough in despair; it locks itself in" (*EO* II:222).

What way of despairing can "attain the breakthrough in despair," and what does this "breakthrough" entail? The answer to these questions seems to reside in the familiar pattern of giving oneself up in order to regain oneself, a pattern that figures centrally Christian doctrine and recurs frequently in Kierkegaard's thinking. We have seen this pattern already in Judge Wilhelm's notion of repenting oneself in order to regain oneself and in Johannes de Silentio's notion of the "movement" of resignation followed by a "movement" of faith in which one regains what has been given up in resignation. Anti-Climacus finds the same pattern in the kind of despair that can be a "corridor" out of despair: "The despair which is the corridor to faith is also due to the help of the eternal; through the eternal the self has the courage to lose itself in order to win itself" (*SUD*:98).

Despair can help here because despair is that power by which one loses oneself. Specifically, what despair can help to break down are the pretension or evasions which constitute the despairing misrelation to oneself. As we have seen, despair tends to manifest itself in a *scandalon* in which one fails to attain or evade whatever one despairingly wants to attain or evade. In this way, the despair within a way of life manifests itself as a prompt to face the failure of this way of life. If one despairs only half-heartedly or finitely, one may try to deal with this stumbling block while clinging to the underlying despair which causes it. But if one despairs "with a vengeance" and "to the full," one will be unable to continue believing in these despairing efforts and will abandon all hope for a

[100] Anti-Climacus also discusses "authentic despair" (*SUD*: 43), although he does not seem to be using this term in the same sense (as the kind of despair that can be a "corridor" out of despair). In any case, qualifying despair as "authentic" obviously presents problems for those who would like to reduce Kierkegaard's ideal to a matter of existential "authenticity." The concept of authenticity as it emerges in 20th Century existentialism is undoubtedly influenced by Kierkegaard's notion of despair in contrast to a proper relation to oneself (e.g. in Heidegger and Sartre). But it should also be clear from the first chapter and from our reply to the 'Moral Monster Objection' that what Kierkegaard takes as his ideal cannot simply be reduced to being authentic in the sense of being self-consistent or 'true to oneself.'

resolution of the problem within despairing categories. Having been completely broken down and exhausted in this way, one will be able to abandon the despairing way of life altogether. It is only when the very foundations of a despairing life have been torn down than new foundations of life without despair can begin to be constructed.

For Judge Wilhelm what is decisive in order for despair to be a corridor out of despair is that the person *choose* or will this despair. He admits that in all despair there is an element of will, but insists that in authentic despair one wills despair "in an infinite sense, in an absolute sense": "Generally speaking, a person cannot despair at all without willing it, but in order truly to despair, a person must truly will it; but when he truly wills it, he is truly beyond despair. When a person has truly chosen despair, he has truly chosen what despair chooses: himself in his eternal validity" (*SUD*:221, 213). While the Judge may be right about the need for the aesthete to will despair (rather than view it as something that happens to him) in order to abandon the aesthetic life, he is wrong to suppose that "either a person has to live esthetically or he has to live ethically" (*EO* II:68). As we have seen, the ethical life is also a life of despair, and the despair here is precisely an overemphasis of one's will. Therefore, for Anti-Climacus the right way to despair is not so much to will or choose despair as to face the despair that resides in the overestimation or underestimation of one's domain of choice. According to Anti-Climacus, one cannot get out of despair self-reliantly, on the strength of one's own will. He seems to have Judge Wilhelm in mind in warning:

> [If] a person in despair is, as he thinks, aware of his despair and doesn't refer to it mindlessly as something that happens to him [...], and wants now on his own, all on his own, and with all his might to remove the despair, then he is still in despair and through all his seeming effort only works himself all the more deeply into a deeper despair. (*SUD*:44)

This is not to say that Anti-Climacus rejects the idea that one should will one's despair 'to the fullest'; he simply rejects the idea that this willing effort accomplishes the transition out of despair all by itself. A parallel point is made by Johannes de Silentio in relation to resignation: "His own strength suffices for the movement of repentance, but it calls for absolutely all his energies, and it is therefore impossible for him by his own strength to return and grasp reality" (*FT*:125). As Johannes realizes, the step of losing oneself may be achieved by one who is willing and earnest enough, but the step of regaining oneself lies outside one's own powers:

> I can see then that it requires strength and energy and freedom of spirit to make the infinite movement of resignation; I can also see that it can be done. The next step dumbfounds me, my brain reels; for having made the movement of resignation, now on the strength of the absurd to get everything, to get one's desire, whole, in full, that requires more-than-human powers. (*FT*:76)

The same may be said for despair. Having willed one's despair to the point of utter collapse, the self has no further strength left to rebuild a non-despairing life and no evaluative basis on which to "choose" this better way of life. According to Anti-Climacus, the step of regaining oneself as a person free of despair must be left entirely to God. What is needed after the despairing self has been broken down through despair is not some further accomplishment by this self, but rather the acceptance of oneself as a gift and task from God. Of course in taking up the "task" of one's self, one once again becomes active, but the fundamental shift from the collapse of despair to the life faith is foremost a matter of passive acceptance.

What the life of faith gained through this corridor of despair is like was discussed in the first chapter. Anti-Climacus makes it clear that the life of faith includes a "sense of security and repose" that means that "one has got the better

of despair and won peace" (*SUD*:54-5). Despair in the truest sense, as the misrelation to oneself, is not present in the life of faith, since one relates to oneself as one truly is (which for Kierkegaard means as a self established by, and grounded in, God.) That this life is free from the symptoms of despair is also evident in Anti-Climacus' statement that "Not to be in despair may mean precisely to be in despair, and it may also mean having been saved from being in despair" (*SUD*:54).[101] What he means here is that a life free from the stumbling blocks or feelings of despair may either be one of despair after all, or it may mean that one has been saved from despair through faith. The life of faith is free from all the manifestations of despair we have discussed, but this freedom from despair is not won 'once-and-for-all'. Anti-Climacus explains: "Not being in despair must mean the annihilated possibility of the ability to be in it. For it to be true that someone is not in despair, he must be annihilating that possibility every instant" (*SUD*:45). Part of the "task" of one's life is to resist slipping back into these various forms of despair.

Yet there is also a sense in which something of these despairing ways of life is preserved within the life of faith. This brings us to the final aspect of despair's positive role to be discussed: despair's role in what is not just a "metamorphosis" but a "transfiguration." The transfiguration by which a despairing way of life is superceded follows the dialectic of a Hegelian *Aufhebung*: what is cancelled in this process is also in some sense preserved. What is cancelled is the role of enjoyment or ethical well-being as one's highest *telos*; but enjoyment and ethical well-being are preserved as part of the life of faith. They find their proper place in life only when they are not taken as a highest *telos*, but are treated as subordinate to the *telos* of faith. Thus Judge Wilhelm says that the ethical "does not want to destroy the aesthetic but to

[101] This is not to say that the life of faith is free of any suffering or misery. To the contrary, as we discussed in the first chapter, and as Anti-Climacus elaborates in *Practice in Christianity*, living the life of faith in the world is to invite suffering and alienation. As Kierkegaard develops in some of the later writings especially, this suffering is essential to the life of faith because it is part of what it means to live in *imitatio Christi*. Yet these sufferings are not incompatible with the "peace and repose" of faith foretold by Anti-Climacus; rather, living the life of faith means finding peace, repose and joy even amidst suffering.

transfigure it" (*EO* II:253). He insists that "despair is no break but a transfiguration" in that "all the aesthetic remains in a person except that it is made an auxiliary and precisely thereby is preserved" (*EO* II:228-9). Likewise, as we saw in the first chapter, both ethical responsibility and aesthetic enjoyment are preserved in the life of faith. In fact, lasting enjoyment, genuine ethical commitment and sincere repentance *only* become possible in a life of faith.

I would like to end this chapter by saying a few words about the usefulness of Kierkegaard's concept of 'despair' for ethics. As I indicated at the beginning the chapter and throughout, I think the concept of despair allows ethics to understand ethical failures in a broader, more holistic way (as compared to what a traditional action-centered or even virtue-centered ethics can offer.)[102] Utilizing this concept, we can understand that when a person commits an ethical wrongdoing, this action did not just appear *ex nihilo*. Most often it was the outgrowth of an underlying evaluative stance that had been present even before the particular misdeed, a stance misaligned toward, or simply aligned *against* life (i.e. against oneself, others, and actual existence as a whole). Thus, I think Kierkegaard's concept of despair allows ethics to take a deeper look at the phenomenon of ethical failure. This concept also allows a more expansive understanding of ethical failure in that we can understand as an ethical failure not just a violation of an ethical law or principle, but also the internal failure within certain values, ways of holding values and fundamental life-choices. Thus, the concept of despair allows ethics to engage in a discussion of what is often most important for a person: not the fulfillment of moral laws but this person's fundamental beliefs, attitudes, and values, and goals. The concept of despair is also one of the most fruitful meeting points between ethics and psychology; it allows such things as feelings of disappointment, anxiety,

[102] Anti-Climacus himself comments on the holistic breadth of application of his notion of sin as despair (cf. *SUD*:113-4). He insists that individual acts of wrongdoing can be understood as following from a fundamental stance of despair ("willfulness against God"). Moreover, he points out that his definition of sin as despair encompasses more than just violations of ethical precepts, since "everything, speaking humanly, can be more or less as it should be in these respects, and yet the whole life be sin" (*SUD*:113-4).

desperation, etc. to be treated as psychological phenomena but also understood in relation to one's overall ethical stance.

Another significant advantage to an ethics which incorporates the notion of despair as an 'internal collapse' is that we can then discuss ethical failures without having to rely on some objective ethical standard by which to judge these ethical failures. This is not to say that Kierkegaard's notion of despair is devoid of substantial evaluative presuppositions. But these presuppositions are employed in the service of showing how a way of life fails by its own criteria, how this way of life represents a stance in which one misrelates to oneself and to actuality, thereby inviting the painful disappointments or stumbling blocks which result from this skewed relation to actuality. This absence of reliance on an external standard allows a great breadth of applicability for the concept of despair in the sense that it can deal with failures to relate properly to one's choices and values *whatever these may be*. It thereby allows for common ground in discussions between proponents of various conflicting beliefs and values.

Lastly, for those who are convinced by the need for greater holism in ethics and are willing to take Kierkegaard as a guide here, the concept of despair allows a useful internal critique of Kierkegaard. In suggesting that we take Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as guides, I do not mean to suggest that we should accept their thinking uncritically. In fact, I think there are many notions in the works of each thinker that must be questioned and possibly set aside. In the next chapter we will show how Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment* provides a useful internal critique to allow us to know what to take and what to discard in his thinking. Likewise, I think we find in Kierkegaard's account of different forms of despair the internal critique needed to do the same for Kierkegaard's thought. We have already seen several examples of this at work. Our understanding of the despair of the active ethical life allows us to understand what to take and what to discard in the thinking of Judge Wilhelm. Similarly, our understanding of the despair of resignation, reserve, 'desparing over one's sins' and the like allows us to understand what to take and what to discard in works written from

the standpoint of resignation and 'religiousness A'. While this applies most obviously to the work of Johannes de Silentio and Johannes Climacus, I suspect it is just as helpful in understanding many of the works written in Kierkegard's own name that likewise represent a stance of resignation or 'religiousness A.' [103]

[103] Although elaborating on this internal critique lies outside the bounds of this study, I would include in this grouping of resigned works books such as *For Self-Examination, Judge for Yourself*, and much of the material in *Works of Love* and the *Edifying Discourses*. Understood as 'correctives' allowing readers to take the first steps toward faith, these works are indeed valuable. But insofar as they often emphasize resignation and repentance without faith's accompanying hope and joy over forgiveness, they can represent a despairing viewpoint and we should be wary of them as such. Considering these works in the context of the analysis of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*, I think we can understand what to take from them and what to leave or discard.

CHAPTER 4
NIETZSCHE'S NOTION OF INTERNAL COLLAPSE: NIHILISM

In the last chapter we saw how a way of life can collapse internally according to Kierkegaard's conception of despair. Nietzsche has a similar conception of how a way of life can collapse internally, thereby allowing a transition to a new way of life. As usual, Nietzsche has a variety of names for this phenomenon. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he speaks of "decay" (*Verfall*) and "diminishment" (*Verkleinerung*) whereas in the *Genealogy* he labels this decay "nihilism" (*Nihilismus*), and in later works such as *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Anti-Christ*, and *Ecce Homo*, he settles on the word "*décadence*." Despite this plurality of terms, I think we can find some consistent ideas about internal collapse attached to each of these terms. Nietzsche himself indicates the connection between these terms by referring to *décadence* as a matter of "decay" (*Verfalls*) or "diminishment" (*Verkleinerung*) (*TI* "Socrates" 2, *TI* "Reason" 6, *TI* "Expeditions" 37, A:19), and by using the terms "nihilism" and "*décadence*" synonymously in some passages (*A*:6, *A*:20).

This does not mean that Nietzsche always uses these terms uniformly; as other scholars have pointed out, there are a variety of ways in which Nietzsche approaches the concept of nihilistic collapse.[104] Sometimes terms for this collapse are used to describe the nature of this collapse, sometimes to label particular examples of it. Sometimes these terms describe the cause of this collapse, or the collapse itself, and sometimes they describe its effects or symptoms. Nonetheless, there are some central ideas about this internal collapse that can be

[104] For example, Solomon traces ten different uses of the term "nihilism" in Nietzsche. Robert Solomon "Nietzsche, Nihilism, and Morality" in Robert Solomon, *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973), 202-225.

found consistently expressed in a range of works from *Beyond Good and Evil* to *Ecce Homo*. Among the various ways Nietzsche discusses these ideas, he consistently develops a notion of internal collapse involving: (a) a willed stance one takes against oneself and against life, and (b) a weariness and loss of a will to live that comes when we lose our reverence and love for ourselves.

In the first section to follow, I will explore these concepts as a way of elucidating the notion of internal collapse in Nietzsche's thinking. I will trace the connections between Nietzsche's discussion of "decay" and "decline" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, of "nihilism" in the *Genealogy*, and of *décadence*" in *Twilight*, *The Anti-Christ*, and *Ecce Homo*. My point is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of the way Nietzsche uses these terms in each case, but to develop a workable sketch of his notion of internal collapse. (For the sake of convenience, I will often refer to this unified notion of internal collapse simply as "nihilism.") The second section will trace the genealogy behind what Nietzsche finds to be a contemporary crisis of nihilism; this will enable us to understand the nature and cause of contemporary nihilism and it will provide some clues as to how nihilism can be overcome. In the third section, I will explore Nietzsche's notion of "self-overcoming" and "redemption" in relation to this internal collapse and explain how its destructive force can be turned against itself in order to bring about a new, non-collapsing way of life. In the fourth section, I will discuss the usefulness of the concept of nihilism as a general ethical concept, and I will address objections to my reading of Nietzsche on this issue. I will end by saying a few words about how Nietzsche's account of internal collapse, especially the notion of *ressentiment*, can be useful in allowing a critical reading of Nietzsche's own works.

§1 NIETZSCHE'S NOTIONS OF DECAY, NIHILISM, AND DÉCADENCE

Concurrent with his early suggestions that we prepare a "typology of morals," Nietzsche expresses interest in the morphology by which "value-feelings and value-distinctions live, grow, beget, and *perish*" (*BGE*:186, my

emphasis.) Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche often uses the metaphor of sickness and disease to describe the decay and decline of different system of belief ("moralities") or the ethical types that embody them.[105] In a passage remarkably similar to Kierkegaard's analysis in *The Sickness Unto Death*, Nietzsche discusses someone whose "inward turned glance" betrays "his will to nothingness, nihilism": "'If only I were someone else,' sighs this glance: 'but there is no hope of that. I am who I am: how could I ever get free of myself? And yet – I *am sick of myself*!'" (*GM* III:14) As I shall explain, the sickness of nihilism and *décadence*, like the sickness of despair, is primarily a matter of misrelating to oneself, of taking an existential stance against oneself and against life.

Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche concerns himself with diagnosing the nature of this sickness and of searching for a cure. Also like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche often makes a distinction between this sickness itself and the effects or symptoms of this sickness. For example, Nietzsche often talks about altruistic morality and 'otherworldly' religious and philosophical conceptions as symptoms and signs of decline (*GM* P6, *TI* "Reason" 6, *A*:19, *EH* "Destiny" 8). Although he sometimes refers to nihilism as growing out of this morality, it is clear that what declines and collapses is not a moral theory or a religious theology. These belief systems are the outgrowth of a particular 'mode of valuation' or way of life, and in this case they are the effects and results of an underlying state of internal collapse. This is precisely why these belief-systems can function as "symptoms" of this collapse:

> When we speak of values we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish values. . . .From this it follows that even that *anti-nature of a morality* which conceives God as the contrary concept to and condemnation of life is only a value judgment on the part of life – of *what* life? of *what* kind of life? – But I have already given the answer: of declining, debilitated, weary, condemned life. (*TI* "Morality" 5).

[105]For Nietzsche, physical sickness is not *just* a metaphor for the collapse of values. Much more than Kierkegaard, Nietzsche takes seriously the notion of a physiological dysfunction behind our ethical beliefs and the stance we take toward life.

This indicates that internal collapse is not a matter of an internal inconsistency within a set of ideas. For Nietzsche whatever inconsistencies may exist between these ideas stem from the deeper conflict within the agent's way of life. So Nietzsche's notion of nihilism, like Kierkegaard's notion of despair, does not primarily name a conflict between the agent's beliefs. Rather, it names a conflict *within* the agent, or more specifically, a conflict within the stance the agent takes with respect to himself and life as a whole (i.e. *against* himself and life as a whole). Specifically, for Nietzsche what collapses is what we have already identified as the ascetic or slavish stance toward oneself and the world.

However he labels it, Nietzsche leaves no doubt as to the magnitude of the danger posed by this internal collapse: it is "the *great* danger to mankind" (*GM* P5). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche discusses his contemporary situation as that of "man in decay, that is to say in diminishment, in process of becoming mediocre and losing his value" (*BGE*:203). Nietzsche considers this process "the collective danger that 'man' himself *may degenerate*" and he indicates that "Christian-European morality" has helped bring about the "degeneration and diminution of man to the perfect herd animal" (*BGE*:203). In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche concludes that it is the supposedly unegoistic "instincts of pity, self-abnegation, [and] self-sacrifice" that are the source of this danger: "It was precisely here that I saw the *great* danger to mankind, its sublimest enticement and seduction – but to what? to nothingness? – it was precisely here that I saw the beginning of the end, the dead stop, a retrospective weariness, the will turning against life, the tender and sorrowful signs of the ultimate illness" (*GM* P5). Nietzsche is also clear that this danger is ubiquitous, at least in European culture: "my assertion is that all the values in which mankind at present summarizes its supreme desiderata are *décadence* values […] values of decline, *nihilistic* values hold sway under the holiest names" *(A*:6).

Although Nietzsche is clearly worried about a *collective* danger facing all of Europe (if not also all of humankind), it is also clear that the source of this

danger lies *within* us, namely in our instincts and values. Nietzsche uses the rhetoric of Christianity in calling this collapse the inner "corruption" of man: "It is a painful, dreadful spectacle which has opened up before me: I have drawn back the curtain on the *depravity* of man" *(A*:6). Yet he makes it clear that this is not a doctrine of 'total depravity.' It is not a corruption in human nature *per se*, but rather a corruption in a peculiarly unnatural but currently pervasive form of human life, namely the ascetic way of life. Nietzsche continues:

> In my mouth this word is protected against at any rate one suspicion: that it contains a moral accusation of man. It is – I should like to underline the fact again – free of any moralic acid: and this to the extent that I find that depravity precisely where hitherto one most consciously aspirted to 'virtue', to 'divinity'. I understand depravity, as will already be guessed, in the sense of *décadence*: my assertion is that all the values in which mankind at present summarizes its supreme desiderata are *décadence-values*. *(A*:6)

The danger of nihilism is a widespread collective danger insofar as the ascetic way of life is so widespread. Although Nietzsche generally confines himself to the problem of "European nihilism," he sometimes suggests the problem is more ubiquitous, remarking that those observing Earth from afar would think of it as "the distinctively *ascetic planet*, a nook of disgruntled, arrogant, and offensive creatures filled with a profound disgust at themselves, at the earth, at all life" (*GM* III:11).) Nietzsche locates the 'disease' of European nihilism within a certain set of instincts and values, namely "Christian-European" (i.e., ascetic) instincts and values. But what exactly is the disease within these instincts? As mentioned above, Nietzsche primarily expresses two primary ways in which the decline of nihilism and *décadence* can be understood. It can be understood as the conflict within an agent who takes an active willed stance against himself and against life. Alternately, it can be understood as the lack of a will to live and a general weariness with life. I will explain each of these manifestations of internal collapse in turn and then address the relationship between them.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche declares that "the feelings of devotion, self-sacrifice for one's neighbor, the entire morality of self-renunciation must be taken mercilessly to task and brought to court" (*BGE*:33). One primary objection Nietzsche raises to this ascetic morality of self-denial is that it represents a willed stance against oneself: "The Christian faith is from the beginning sacrifice: sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit, at the same time enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation" (*BGE*:46). Within the morality of pity Nietzsche senses a fundamental stance of self-contempt: "a hoarse, groaning, genuine note of *self-contempt*. It is part of that darkening and uglification of Europe which has now been going on for a hundred years […] *if it is not the cause of it*! The man of "modern ideas," that proud ape, is immoderately dissatisfied with himself: that is certain" (*BGE*:222). As we saw in Chapter 2, the ascetic way of life also represents a willed stance against the world against and life itself. As part of the revaluation of noble values, the ascetic mode of valuation seeks to "reverse the whole love of the earthly and of dominion over the earth into hatred of the earth and the earthly" (*BGE*:62). Nietzsche also finds that the ascetic stance of pity with respect to others, especially when it is glorified "as the *fundamental principle of society*," "at once reveals itself for what it is: as the will to the *denial* of life, as the principle of dissolution and decay" (*BGE*:259).

For Nietzsche, two facts about human nature make the ascetic stance of pity pernicious and corrupting. First, Nietzsche sometimes suggests that "life *is* will to power" and that the ascetic condemnation of any will to power is therefore a condemnation of life (*BGE*:259). Secondly, Nietzsche believes that suffering and hardship, rather than ease and comfort, are the "soil" out of which great human achievements and excellence most often grow. Nietzsche therefore sees the ascetic moralists as representing a willed stance against human nature and human excellence: "we see how *man* is diminishing himself, how *you* are diminishing him!" (*BGE*:225). Nietzsche's solution, which will be discussed in detail in the section on self-overcoming, is to turn pity against pity. By having pity for all that humankind suffers under the belittling and stultifying effects of

the ascetic mode of valuation, we will be led to condemn the ascetic morality of pity: "*our* pity—do you not grasp whom our *opposite* pity is for when it defends itself against your pity as the worst of all pampering and weakening?— Pity *against* pity, then!—" (*BGE*:225)

Beyond Good and Evil also contains a hint at another conception of decay or decline. Here internal collapse is understood not so much as a single willed stance taken against oneself and life as an anarchy of the instincts which gives way to a general weariness and pessimism with respect to life. For example, Nietzsche talks about "corruption" understood "as the indication that anarchy threatens within the instincts, and that the foundation of the emotions which is called 'life' has been shaken" (*BGE*:258). Nietzsche finds that the "man of an era of dissolution" suffers from the internal war among "contrary and often not merely contrary drives and values which struggle with one another and rarely leave one another in peace" (*BGE*:200). Rather than a willed stance, this collapse takes the form of a weakness of the will or lack of a will. In Nietzsche's words, we find within our contemporary morality a "letting oneself go and letting oneself fall": "Today the taste of the time and the virtue of the time weakens and thins down the will; nothing is as timely as weakness of the will" (*BGE*:212). Nietzsche finds that someone in this condition seeks only an end to this internal conflict: "such a man of late cultures and broken lights will, on average, be a rather weak man: his fundamental desire is that the war which he *is* should come to an end" (*BGE*:200). This weariness and weakness of will manifests itself as an evaluative stance which condemns human life in general:

> Suppose the abused, oppressed, suffering, unfree, those uncertain of themselves and weary should moralize: what would their moral evaluations have in common? Perhaps a pessimistic mistrust of the entire situation of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man along with his situation. (*BGE*:260)

In later works Nietzsche continues to present these two notions of internal collapse side by side; he now uses the terms "nihilism" and "*décadence*" to

describe both a willed stance against oneself and against life and a pessimistic lack of a will to live. The former meaning is usually directly associated with ascetic ideals, whereas the latter is sometimes presented as the prompt for ascetic ideals and sometimes as the result of these ideals. A review of how these two different conceptions of internal collapse are presented in these later works will establish my claim that we can find some consistent meanings behind Nietzsche's different labels for internal collapse.

First let us review the ways in which internal collapse is understood as a willed stance against oneself and against life as a whole. In the concluding section of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche writes that "all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal" expresses a stance of hatred of oneself and of life as a whole:

> [H]atred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself – all this means – let us dare to grasp it – *a will to nothingness*, an aversion [*Widerwillen*] to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life. (*GM* III:28)

A similar idea is expressed in *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche dubs Christianity "a rebellion against life" and a "condemnation of life by the living" (*TI* "Morality" 5). "Anti-natural morality," says Nietzsche, turns "against the instincts of life" and represents "the *condemnation* of these instincts" (*TI* "Morality" 4). Nietzsche is especially critical of the ascetic condemnation of sexuality, which he sees as a condemnation of the body and of the presupposition of human life: "It was Christianity, with its *ressentiment against* life at the bottom of its heart, which first made something unclean of sexuality: it threw *filth* on the origin, on the presupposition of our life" (*TI* "Ancients" 4). The fourth proposition of his "Decree Against Christianity" in *The Anti-Christ* makes this point even more forcefully: "The sermon on chastity is a public instigation to anti-nature. Every display of contempt for sexual love, and every

defilement of it through the concept "dirty" ["unrein"] is original sin against the holy spirit of life." Also in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche complains that Christianity "has made an ideal of whatever *contradicts* the instinct of the strong life to preserve itself " *(A*:5). He claims that the aim of Christian concepts is "is *to devalue* nature and natural values" *(A*:38).

Nietzsche locates the same life-denying tendencies in modern philosophy, especially the philosophy of Schopenhauer, which made pity "*the* virtue, the basis and source of all virtues. […] this was done by a philosophy that was nihilistic and had inscribed *the negation of life* upon its shield. Schopenhauer was consistent enough: pity negates life and renders it *more deserving of negation*.—Pity is the *practice* of nihilism" *(A*:7). In this work Nietzsche also develops the idea that ascetic ideals are rooted in an "*instinctive hatred of reality*", where this reality is understood as the bodily, 'this-worldly' existence in which humans inevitably find themselves: "Once the concept of "nature" had been invented as the opposite of "God," "natural" had to become a synonym of "reprehensible": this whole world of fiction is rooted in *hatred* of the natural (of reality!—)" *(A*:30,A:15).

Nietzsche continues this line of criticism in *Ecce Homo*, writing that when "seriousness is deflected from the self-preservation and the enhancement of the strength of the body, *that is, of life*, when anemia is construed as an ideal, and contempt for the body as "salvation of the soul," what else is this if not a *recipe* for décadence?—" (*EH* 'Books' D 2) Nietzsche considers the Christian concept of a transcendent, perfect God to be an attempt to devalue and condemn earthly reality: "The concept of "God" invented as a counterconcept of life,—everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous, the whole hostility unto death against life synthesized in this concept in a gruesome unity!" (*EH* "Destiny" 8) Nietzsche finds the same purpose in the Platonic/Christian notion of a transcendent, 'true' world of perfect, unchanging entities: "The concept of the "beyond," the "true world" invented in order to devaluate the *only* world there is,—in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality!" (*EH* "Destiny" 8) As before,

Nietzsche focuses his attacks on the ascetic morality of pity and altruism: "In the concept of the 'selfless', the 'self-denier', the distinctive sign of décadence, feeling *attracted* by what is harmful, not being *able* to find any longer what profits one, self-destruction is turned into the sign of value itself, into 'duty', into 'holiness', into what is 'divine' in man!" (*EH* "Destiny" 8)

Nietzsche considers it his distinctive insight to realize that those who have hitherto given us moral ideals were one and all décadents: "this is *my* insight: the teachers, the leaders of humanity, theologians all of them, were also, all of them, décadents: *hence* the revaluation of all values into hostility to life, *hence* morality" (*EH* 'Destiny' 7). Nietzsche even stipulates that morality as it presently exists can be *defined* by this willed stance against life: "*Definition of morality*: Morality—the idiosyncrasy of décadents, with the ulterior motive of revenging *oneself against life*—and successfully "(*EH* 'Destiny' 7). As mentioned before, Nietzsche makes it clear that the corruption does not lie within humanity *per se*, but rather in the ideals that have corrupted it: "Christian morality—the most malignant form of the will to lie, the real Circe of humanity: that which *corrupted* it" (*EH* 'Destiny' 7). Nietzsche's objection is not only to the other-worldly and resentful basis of this morality, but also its claim to universality, a claim which entails condemning all forms of life strong and self-assured enough to resist these extreme, world-renouncing values:

> What! Is humanity itself decadent? was it always?— What is certain is that it has been *taught* only decadence values as supreme values. The morality that would un-self man is the morality of decline *par excellence*—the fact, "I'm perishing," transposed into the imperative, "all of you *ought* to perish"—and *not only* into the imperative! ... This only morality that has been taught so far, the morality of un-selfing, reveals a will to the end, fundamentally, it negates life.(*EH* 'Destiny' 7)

Turning now to the second conception of internal collapse, we find that this notion is also consistently expressed throughout these same texts. As mentioned before, in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche declares nihilism the "ultimate illness" and pintpoints the source of this illness in the ascetic instincts of "pity,

self-abnegation, self-sacrifice" – "it was precisely here that I saw the beginning of the end, the dead stop, a retrospective weariness, the will turning against life, the tender and sorrowful signs of the ultimate illness" (*GM* P5). Here nihilism is understood not so much a will turned against life as a general weariness with life and a lack of reverence and love of humankind brought about by the degeneration of humankind to something mediocre and weak. In two important passages, Nietzsche notes that the taming and self-diminishing project of ascetic morality described above has successfully removed our "fear of man," but it has also removed our respect for him:

> For this is how things are: the diminution and leveling [*die Verkleinerung und Ausgleichung*] of European man constitutes *our* greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary. [...] Here precisely is what has become a fatality for Europe – together with the fear of man we have also lost our love of him, our reverence for him, our hopes for him, even the will to him. The sight of man now makes us weary – what is nihilism today if it is not *that*? – We are weary *of man*. (*GM* I:12)

> What is to be feared, what has a more calamitous effect than any other calamity, is that man should inspire not profound fear but profound *nausea*; also not great fear but great pity. Suppose these two were one day to unite, they would inevitably beget one of the uncanniest monsters: the 'last will' of man, his will to nothingness, nihilism. (*GM* III:14)

The first of these two passages suggests that Nietzsche himself suffers from this weariness at the sight of his fellow human beings, and a passage from *The Anti-Christ* confirms this: "There are days when I am afflicted with a feeling blacker than the blackest melancholy—*contempt of man*. And to leave no doubt concerning *what* I despise, *whom* I despise: it is the man of today, the man with whom I am fatefully contemporaneous" *(A*:38). In his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche admits that he is himself partly a décadent and he lists this as one of the reasons he is so good at diagnosing decline and its opposite: "I have a subtler sense for the signs of ascent and descent than any man has ever had, I am the teacher *par excellence* for this—I know both, I am both" (*EH* "Wise" 1). Yet

Nietzsche also indicates that he is more the antithesis of a decadent than a decadent: "I am also its antithesis. My proof for this is, among other things, that I always instinctively chose the *right* means against wretched states: while the décadent typically chooses means that are disadvantageous for him. As *summa summarum* [overall] I was healthy, as an angle, as a specialty, I was a decadent" (*EH* "Wise" 2). This definition of *décadence* as instinctively choosing what is disadvantageous for oneself is one Nietzsche repeats in several places (*TI* "Expeditions" 35, A:6, *EH* "Wise" 2, *EH* "Destiny" 8). In *Twilight* Nietzsche even calls this the "formula" for *décadence* and indicates how this tendency is related to the ascetic morality of altruism:

> An "altruistic" morality, a morality under which egoism *languishes* – is under all circumstances a bad sign. This applies to individuals, it applies especially to peoples. The best are lacking when egoism begins to be lacking. To choose what is harmful to *oneself*, to be *attracted* by 'disinterested' motives almost constitutes the formula of *décadence*. 'Not to seek *one's own* advantage' – that is merely a moral figleaf for a quite different, namely physiological fact: 'I no longer know how to *find* my advantage'. . . .Disintegration of the instincts! (*TI* "Expeditions" 35).

As we shall see when we explore the genealogy of this collapse, the ascetic morality of pity and altruism both grows out of and promotes this disintegration of the instincts. For Nietzsche, this "anarchy of the instincts" is so widespread in contemporary times as to almost define what is modern: our "instincts contradict, disturb, destroy each other; I have already defined what is *modern* as physiological self-contradiction (*TI* "Expeditions" 41). This disintegration of the instincts is also linked to pessimistic judgments about life. Nietzsche continues the passage quoted above by suggesting a connection between ascetic altruism and a pessimistic condemnation of life *per se*: "Man is finished when he becomes altruistic. Instead of saying naively, "*I* am no longer worth anything," the moral lie in the mouth of the décadent says, "Nothing is worth anything—*life* is not worth anything" (*TI* "Expeditions" 35). Ascetic self-denial in relations with others (altruism and pity) has at its source the same existential stance as ascetic

self-denial in relation to the world, which is "now considered *worthless as such* (nihilistic withdrawal from it, a desire for nothingness or a desire for its antithesis)" (*GM* II:21). This pessimistic judgment of life is linked to the problem of a lack of meaning in life, especially a meaning for suffering. In the last section of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche labels this crushing lack of meaning "suicidal nihilism": "The meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far" (*GM* III:28).

Nietzsche finds this pessimism not only in modern beliefs but as a facet of widespread philosophical consensus: "In every age the wisest have passed the identical judgment on life: it is worthless" a judgment Nietzsche finds to be "full of doubt, full of melancholy, full of weariness with life, full of opposition to life" (*TI* "Socrates" 1). As evidence, Nietzsche points to Socrates' last words: "Even Socrates said as he died: 'To live—that means to be sick a long time: I owe a cock to the savior Asclepius.' Even Socrates had had enough of it" (*TI* "Socrates":1). Nietzsche diagnoses this pessimistic consensus as stemming from an underlying physiological condition, namely the anarchy of the instincts just discussed: "these wisest men were in some way in *physiological* accord since they stood – *had* to stand – in the same negative relation to life" (*TI* "Socrates" 2). Nietzsche suggests that in Socrates' Athens, this condition had become the "universal danger" for which Socrates seemed to have the cure: "Everywhere the instincts were in anarchy; everywhere people were but five steps from excess: the *monstrum in animo* was the universal danger" (*TI* "Socrates" 9). Later in this passage Nietzsche clarifies what he takes to have been the "universal exigency: that no one was any longer master of himself, that the instincts were becoming mutually *antagonistic*" (*TI* "Socrates" 9). Importantly, Nietzsche sees *décadence* not only in this anarchy of the instincts, but also in the extreme measures employed to reign in this anarchy: "The same means in the fight against a craving—castration, extirpation—is instinctively chosen by those who are too weak-willed, too degenerate, to be able to impose moderation on themselves" (*TI* "Morality" 2). In the case of Socrates, reason is employed to tyrannize over the

chaotic instincts in order to keep them under control. Nietzsche sees *décadence* in both the problem and this remedial solution: "It is not only the admitted dissoluteness and anarchy of his instincts which indicate *décadence* in Socrates: the superfetation of the logical and that *barbed malice* which distinguishes him also point in that direction" (*TI* "Socrates":4). As Nietzsche later explains: "To *have* to fight the instincts—that is the formula of décadence: as long as life is *ascending*, happiness equals instinct" (*TI* "Socrates":11).

What has been said so far establishes that Nietzsche had a sustained interest in the process of degeneration and decline he sometimes calls "nihilism" and sometimes calls "*décadence*," and it reveals a consistency among the ideas presented by these terms. But it does not yet show that these ideas are consistent with themselves, and it may even suggest the opposite. After all, taking a persistent, unified willed stance against life is not the same thing as having one's instincts in anarchy; they may even seem to be mutually exclusive insofar as this anarchy could entail lacking a unified will altogether. In addition, my account leaves open the important question of how the ascetic way of life fits into the second conception of collapse discussed above, the weary pessimism with life. How can Nietzsche be consistent in sometimes blaming the ascetic way of life as the cause of this kind of nihilism while at other times indicating that the ascetic way of life is a response to this nihilism and even a 'cure' for it? The answers to these questions can be discovered only by tracing the genealogy of nihilism as Nietzsche sets it out.

§2 THE GENEALOGY OF NIHILISM

We know that Nietzsche intended to trace this genealogy in a separate work entitled "On the History of European Nihilism," but this work was never written (*GM* III:27). Nonetheless, much of this genealogy can be discerned from the genealogy of morality and 'bad conscience' that Nietzsche traces in the *Genealogy of Morals* and other works. In fact, the basic outlines of the genealogy of nihilism have already been discussed in Chapter 2, where we traced

Nietzsche's closely related genealogy of the 'bad conscience'. The story of nihilism begins at the inception of large-scale organized societies and with the means employed in the "taming" process,"the welding of a hitherto unchecked and shapeless populace into a firm form" (*GM* II:17). Nietzsche writes that the 'bad conscience' of the newly "tamed man" resulted from "the most fundamental change he ever experienced – that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed with the walls of society and of peace" (*GM* II:16).

One challenge was that this newly "tamed man" could not rely on his natural instincts in trying to navigate the new conditions of 'civilized' life: "well adapted to the wilderness, to war, to prowling, to adventure: suddenly all their instincts were disvalued and 'suspended'" (*GM* II:16). The more dangerous challenge was that these instincts "had not ceased to make their usual demands! Only it was hardly or rarely possible to humor them: as a rule they had to seek new and, as it were, subterranean gratifications" (*GM* II:16). Thus began what Nietzsche calls "the *internalization* of man": "All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward […] Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction – all this turned against the possessors of such instincts" (*GM* II:16). Here we find the beginning of the inward 'war' within and with oneself, the inner turmoil of a life "turned against itself, taking sides against itself" which the ascetic later directs into a unified, willed stance against oneself and against life as a whole. At this stage, however, we find merely a "yearning and desperate prisoner" experiencing a desperate, directionless conflict within himself: "The man who, from lack of external enemies and resistances and forcibly confined to the oppressive narrowness and punctiliousness of custom, impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted, and maltreated himself" (*GM* II:16). As Nietzsche says, what we find here is a pathetic, miserable "animal that rubbed itself raw against the bars of its cage as one tried to 'tame' it" (*GM* II:16). These conditions also gave rise to "the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred," the feelings of pent up rancor, rage, and lust for revenge among those who are powerless to vent these feelings in action.

It is this dire situation which led to the first crisis of nihilism, the sickness of "suicidal nihilism" for which the ascetic stance was introduced as a 'cure.' Nietzsche says very little about this earlier crisis of nihilism, and it is difficult to get a clear idea of when he thinks it occurred.[106] Yet Nietzsche leaves no doubt as to its existence, since he thinks the key to understanding the ascetic stance is to understand how it originated as a 'cure' for this earlier crisis of nihilism: "such a self-contradiction as the ascetic appears to represent, 'life *against* life,' is, physiologically considered and not merely physiologically, a simple absurdity" (*GM* III:13). According to Nietzsche, we must understand that "this ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this *denier* – precisely he is among the greatest *conserving* and yes-creating forces of life" (*GM* III:13). Specifically, we must understand the ascetic priests as acting to preserve life in the face of this earlier threat of nihilism. Nietzsche says of the person living according to this ascetic stance: "The No he says to life brings to light, as if by magic, an abundance of tender Yeses; even when he *wounds* himself, this master of destruction, of self-destruction – the very wound itself afterward compels him *to live*" (*GM* III:13). As this passage suggests, Nietzsche identifies this earlier crisis of nihilism with the second type of nihilism discussed above, namely the lack of a goal or a meaning to life that leads to a lack of a will to live. The value of the ascetic stance for preserving life is that it provides this meaning:

> Apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human animal, had no meaning so far. His existence on earth contained no goal; 'why man at all?' – was a question without an answer; the will for man and earth was lacking; behind every great human destiny there sounded as a refrain a yet greater 'in vain!' *This* is precisely what the ascetic ideal means: that something was *lacking*, that man was surrounded by a fearful *void* – he

[106] In the case of Greek society, at least, we get a hint from Nietzsche's discussion of Athens in the time of Socrates. As mentioned above, Nietzsche believes that the *"anarchy of the instincts"* posed a "universal danger" for the Athenians for which Socrates appeared to be the cure (*TI* "Socrates" 9). In general, I think Nietzsche's thoughts on the genealogy of nihilism, the 'bad conscience' and ascetic morality are less valuable as a speculative historical account than as a way of understanding the dialectical nature of these things. I put very little weight on the historical accuracy of Nietzsche's account, although I think the dialectical relations set out in this account are key to understanding the process of "redemption" and "self-overcoming" by which Nietzsche thinks we can address the current crisis of nihilism.

> did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he *suffered* from the problem of his meaning. He also suffered otherwise, he was in the main a sickly animal: but his problem was *not* suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, '*why* do I suffer?' Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does *not* repudiate suffering as such; he *desires* it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a purpose of suffering. (*GM* III:28)

Nietzsche believes that this first crisis of nihilism was averted by means of a solution or "cure" provided by the ascetic priest. By focusing general feelings of dissatisfaction and self-contempt into a single, unified, willed stance, the ascetic both put an end to the anarchy of instincts and provided a meaning and goal for those facing the "void" of "suicidal nihilism." This ascetic "cure" involved several related treatments for the problem of nihilism. First and perhaps foremost, the ascetic's notion of moral guilt provided a meaning and purpose for suffering and for the life of suffering; the ascetic task of discovering and repenting of one's guilt gave the powerless and suffering a goal and allowed them to exercise a will. As we discussed in Chapter 2, the notion of guilt developed out of the debtor-creditor relationship and originally had no moral connotations. But the ascetic priest seized on the notion of guilt, especially the notion of guilt before God, in order to interpret suffering as a meaningful punishment for guilt: "The chief trick the ascetic priest permitted himself" was "the exploitation of the *sense of guilt*" (*GM* III:20). The sufferer now has an indication of some meaningful cause for his suffering: "he must seek it in *himself*, in some *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a *punishment*" (*GM* III:13). Nietzsche is clear that this solution does not bring an end to human suffering; indeed, it brings with it a new form of suffering in that in addition to the original suffering one now suffers from feelings of guilt. Within the ascetic solution, "suffering was *interpreted*; the tremendous void seems to have been filled; the door was closed to any kind of suicidal nihilism. This interpretation – there is no doubt of it – brought fresh suffering with it,

deeper, more inward, more poisonous, more life-destructive suffering" (*GM* III:28).

Interpreting suffering as guilt may be the "chief trick" of the ascetic priest, but the ascetic's "cure" for the first crisis of nihilism involves other remedies as well. The ascetic stance not only provides a meaningful interpretation for the life of suffering, it also provided some way for the powerless and suffering to exercise a will. The pessimistic "broken will to live" is replaced by the ascetic "will to nothingness," the will to actively engage in the diminishment and destruction of oneself, the denial and belittlement of oneself and the world:

> [T]his hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself – all this means – let us dare to grasp it – *a will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life: but it is and remains a *will!*. . . And, to repeat in conclusion what I said that the beginning: man would rather will nothingness than *not* will.- (*GM* III:28)

I think we can also understand the ascetic priest's revaluation of values as playing a part of this "cure." As mentioned in Chapter 2, this revaluation involves what Nietzsche calls an 'inversion' of the "aristocratic value-equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God)" (*GM* I:8). Everything that was considered a virtue in the noble mode of valuation is reinterpreted as a vice according to the ascetic mode of valuation. We can understand this revaluation as an extension of the ascetic conception of moral guilt insofar as this revaluation aims to portray the nobles as "guilty." Moreover, the ascetics sought to poison the conscience of the nobles themselves, to infect them with feelings of guilt, uncertainty, and "remorse of conscience" (*BGE*:62, *GM* I:13). The ascetic teaches the powerful and powerless alike to have a conscience against those instincts and that way of living that had hitherto defined what was 'noble' in the ethical sense according to the noble mode of valuation.

We can also understand this revaluation of values as helping to 'close the door on suicidal nihilism' in that it provides a meaning and justification to the lives of those whose powerlessness in the face of life might otherwise lead to a "broken will to life" (*A*:50). Their inability to act or to significantly impact the world is reinterpreted as a 'good will,' a deliberate refraining from doing so out of meritorious consideration for moral goodness. Nietzsche describes the 'manufacture' of ascetic ideals as involving weakness "being lied into something meritorious […] and impotence which does not requite into 'goodness of heart'; anxious lowliness into 'humility'; subjection to those one hates into 'obedience'" (*GM* I:14). It may seem to be one of the many contradictions within the ascetic "cure" that the powerless are on one hand led to see themselves as guilty, to interpret their suffering as punishment for guilt, and yet on the other hand they are led to interpret themselves as good and worthy in comparison with those who are powerful, joyful and self-assured. Perhaps it is simply the case that the powerless feel themselves to be guilty of petty (indeed, indiscoverable) wrongdoings but they feel themselves to be morally superior to those whose power and joy are considered far more 'sinful' (and who do not even repent, as the powerless do).

Another "trick" used by the ascetic priests to give meaning to the lives of those threatened by suicidal nihilism is the invention of some 'other world', a perfect unchanging world different from and *contrary to* the actual lived experience that the suffering and powerless so abhor. Sometimes this realm is interpreted as a "heaven" in which those who suffer and are humble now will live in happiness, ease and exaltation while those who are powerful are excluded and sent to eternal punishment. As evidence for his claim that Christianity is thoroughly infected with *ressentiment*, Nietzsche quotes Aquinas and Tertulian describing how one of the delights of heaven is that the virtuous get to look down on the tortures of the damned (*GM* I:15). Yet Nietzsche finds even the philosophical (e.g., Platonic) notion of a perfect unchanging realm expresses a

fundamentally resentful and ascetic stance toward actual life (*TI* "Reason" 2, *TI* "Reason" 6).

Thus we find that the ascetic way of relating to oneself, to others, and to the world is a response to this earlier crisis of nihilism. According to Nietzsche's genealogy, the first type of nihilism discussed above (taking an active stance against oneself) is a reaction to nihilism of the second type (lacking any unifying will and therefore having a 'broken will to live'.) Willed ascetic nihilism is a reaction to will-less suicidal nihilism; indeed, ascetic nihilism represents a peculiar kind of "cure" for suicidal nihilism. Given this understanding of nihilism, it may seem that the nihlism of the ascetic stance is only apparent: the ascetic stance may *appear* to being saying 'No' to existence and to be taking a stance against life, but in reality it represents one of "the greatest *conserving* and yes-creating forces of life" (*GM* III:13). In Chapter 2, we said that the ascetic way of life and the slavish way of life could be considered to be the same thing insofar as both are organized around the stance of *ressentiment* brought about by their inability to vent aggressive drives in action and insofar as after the ascetic's revaluation of noble values, the slaves and the powerless live by ascetic values and adopt the ascetic mode of valuation. But perhaps we could consider these two 'types' or ways of life separately again and say that the slavish way of life suffers from true nihilism, the suicidal nihilism described above, whereas those taking the ascetic stance toward existence are thereby saved from nihilism. We could then conclude that only the (ancient) slavish way of life collapses internally into nihilism whereas the ascetic life only appears to do so.

Two important considerations tell against this conclusion. First, it is important to realize that the ascetic "cure" does not in fact cure or get rid of the original sickness of nihilism. At heart, the original sickness of nihilism is the *ressentiment*, dissatisfaction, self-contempt, and self-destruction of the person who impatiently "gnaws at" and attacks himself. One might say that nihilism is most fundamentally the state of inner conflict of an organism turned against itself. Nihilism's structure of internal collapse, as I have said before, is the

misrelation to oneself entailed in this antagonistic relationship with oneself. The ascetic solution involves intensifying this antagonism and self-contempt, fueling it with a notion of guilt, and thereby turning it into a goal, an active willed stance against oneself. Far from trying to get rid of the original misrelation (the self turned against itself) the ascetic 'solution' seeks to harness the power of this misrelation, intensifying it, focusing it, and directing it into a willed stance that gives both unity and meaning to the life of the 'man of *ressentiment*'. As Nietzsche says, "if one wanted to express the value of the priestly existence in the briefest formula it would be: the priest alters the direction of *ressentiment*" (*GM* III:15). Specifically, the ascetic seeks "to direct the *ressentiment* of the less severely afflicted sternly back upon themselves ('the one thing needful') – and in this way to exploit the bad instincts of all sufferers for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming" (*GM* III:16).

Nietzsche adds immediately: "It goes without saying that a 'medication' of this kind, a mere affect medication, cannot possibly bring about a real cure of sickness in a physiological sense; we may not even suppose that the instinct of life contemplates or intends any sort of cure" (*GM* III:16). In fact, Nietzsche says that what "must be our most fundamental objection to priestly medication" is that this "cure" is merely symptomatic: it combats only the symptoms of the disease, not its root cause, "the discomfiture of the sufferer, *not* its cause, *not* the real sickness" (*GM* III:17). As Nietzsche explains in *Twilight*:

> It is self-deception on the part of philosophers and moralists to imagine that by making war on *décadence* they therewith elude *décadence* themselves. This is beyond their powers: what they choose as a means, as salvation, is itself but another expression of *décadence*—they *alter* its expression, they do not abolish the thing itself. (*TI* "Socrates" 11)

Building on this first consideration, we must also realize that the ascetic 'cure', not only fails to eradicate the original sickness of nihilism, it actually makes this sickness *worse*. Not only is the ascetic cure ineffective insofar as it is merely symptomatic, it is *counter-productive* in the long run in that "it makes the

sick sicker" (*GM* II:20). Nietzsche says that when the ascetic "stills the pain of the wound *he at the same time infects the wound* – for that is what he knows best of all, this sorcerer and animal tamer, in whose presence everything healthy necessarily grows sick, and everything sick tame" (*GM* III:15). Nietzsche explains that when the ascetic's stance of self-denial and self-diminishment is "chiefly applied to the sick, distressed, and depressed, it invariably makes them sicker, even if it does 'improve' them" in the sense that it makes them "'tamed', 'weakened', 'discouraged,' 'made refined', 'made effete' 'emasculated' (thus almost the same thing as harmed)" (*GM* II:21). In order to see how the ascetic cure makes the sick sicker, we must first realize that the genealogy of nihilism does not end with the advent of the ascetic's symptomatic "cure" to the first crisis of nihilism. To the contrary, Nietzsche is primarily concerned with the present crisis of nihilism, and his genealogy of the first crisis of nihilism is offered as a way for us to understand the nature of this current crisis. We know that the ascetic stance was developed as a reaction to original crisis of suicidal nihilism in which internal disintegration and dissatisfaction resulted in a dangerously 'broken will to live.' But the importance of this realization becomes clear only when we realize that the ascetic solution for this problem has now brought us *back* to a crisis of suicidal nihilism.

Nietzsche says that the ascetic solution "closes the door on any kind of suicidal nihilism," but it seems that it could do so only temporarily. The crisis of nihilism Nietzsche finds in his own day is not primarily a matter of the ascetic's passionate self-reproach and self-denial. Although he may still worry about the lingering presence of this ascetic stance in our beliefs and practices, the greater worry seems to be the weary, pessimistic form of nihilism. This is clearly Nietzsche's worry in the passage quoted partially above:

> For this is how things are: the diminution and leveling of European man constitutes *our* greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary. – We can see nothing today that wants to grow greater, we suspect that things will continue to go down, down, to become thinner, more good-natured,

> more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian – there is no doubt that man is getting 'better' all the time. […] The sight of man now makes us weary – what is nihilism today if it is not *that*? – We are weary *of man*. (*GM* I:12)

We have already discussed how the ascetic 'cure' brings about an increase of suffering, but the more dangerous result of this 'cure' is that it continues to weaken, demean, discourage, and 'break' us until we return to the point at which we no longer have a goal or a will to live. It might be said that the "long reign of ascetic ideals" finally weakens us to the point at which we can no longer rigorously uphold ascetic ideals or sustain the stern ascetic stance against life. The original recipient of the ascetic's cure was the newly 'tamed man' whose natural instincts continued to exert themselves energetically despite the lack of an external means to vent these drives. The ascetic harnessed this chaotic energy, focusing and directing it in the ways described above; we might say that the energy fueling the ascetic stance was the energy of these unvented aggressive drives. But as the weakening, diminishing and 'taming' effects of the ascetic's cure come to fruition in the perfectly tame and mediocre person, the passionate energy behind the ascetic's stance is also lost or diminished. In the end, the victims of the ascetic's 'cure' become the utterly mediocre 'last men' described by Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "Alas! The time of the most contemptible man is coming, the man who can no longer despise himself" (Z Prologue 5).

Thus, the genealogy of nihilism reveals that the nihilism of the ascetic stance is not merely apparent. Nihilism, in an inclusive sense of the term, names the misrelation to oneself of someone who turns away from and against herself and life as a whole. While it is clear that the ascetic stance was originally developed as a "cure" for an earlier threat of pessimistic nihilism, it is also clear that the ascetic stance *always was* an intensified and redirected manifestation of nihilism, and that the ascetic stance eventually leads *back* to a crisis of pessimistic nihilism. Both kinds of nihilism could be described by the term "will to nothingness"; they differ according to how passionate, focused, and unified this

"will" is. Pessimistic 'will to nothingness' is the weary longing for the end, a vague but gnawing self-hatred and dissatisfaction with reality, a sense of meaninglessness and that manifests itself passively in indolence and mediocrity. In contrast, the ascetic 'will to nothingness' is the passionate will to actively deny, demean and diminish oneself and the world.

To some extent, we can draw a meaningful contrast between the life of weary pessimism and the life of active asceticism. But this distinction is similar to the distinction in Kierkegaard between the two forms of the aesthetic life, or between the two forms of the ethical life. In each case, one version of a way of life represents an attempt to solve the problem plaguing the other version of this way of life. As we saw in the last chapter, Kierkegaard, like Nietzsche, thinks that these remedial measures fail because they do not address the underlying problem. The active ascetic 'will to nothingness' has attempted to solve the problem of the life of pessimistic nihilism without addressing the root of nihilism itself. The crisis of values Nietzsche sees in his own time involves both of these forms of nihilism. Nihilism is present in the mediocre life of the 'last men' as well as in the self-denying life of one who still upholds some version of ascetic ideals.

I have explained how nihilism in a general sense can be understood as the state of internal collapse in which one turns away from and against oneself and life as a whole. So described, we can see that Nietzsche's notion of nihilism is structurally very similar to Kierkegaard's notion of despair. Nihilism and despair both name a misrelation in one's fundamental existential stance towards oneself, others and the world. If we ask what it is that collapses internally, both thinkers will answer that it is a way of living, a type of person who lives this way, and the set of beliefs and attitudes that define this 'type.' In other words, as we have defined this term, what collapses internally for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is a *way of life*. Both thinkers insist that ethical failure can only be fully understood on this level, as a failure within the agent's fundamental stance towards himself, others and the world. As will be discussed at length in later

chapters, this shared approach does not mean Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree about all aspects of internal collapse or about what ways of life inwardly collapse. But both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche develop an understanding of how failing according to one's own values is the result of an underlying stance in which one turns against or away from oneself. The fact that the ascetic condemns himself in condemning will to power is a consequence of the fact that the ascetic's evaluations are an expression of a fundamental stance of self-conflict; as we have seen, for Nietzsche these self-condemning evaluative beliefs emerge from a more fundamental stance of opposition to oneself.

Also like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche finds the presence of internal collapse to have some positive potential insofar as it can allow a transition to a way of life that does not collapse internally. For this reason Nietzsche does not unambiguously lament the current crisis of nihilism, and he even suggests that we should 'push what is falling.' In response to the question about whether he is "erecting an ideal or knocking one down" Nietzsche makes clear his intention to do both and indicates the connection between these tasks: "If a temple is to be erected *a temple must be destroyed*" (*GM* II:24). The positive, ideal-erecting part of this task has already been discussed in Chapter 2, where I attempt to provide a sketch of Nietzsche's ideal figure or way of life. What I only mentioned there and what I need to explain further now, is the transition by which the crisis of nihilism is overcome and this new ideal figure emerges. This transition involves what Nietzsche's calls "redemption" (*Erlösung*) and "self-overcoming" (*Selbstaufhebung* or *Selbstüberwindung*) As with Kierkegaard's notion of a 'leap' or 'metamorphosis', this transition is one of the most mysterious and little-discussed ideas in Nietzsche's work. But its importance in Nietzsche's overall schema merits an attempt to survey and analyze what Nietzsche does say about this possibility for a positive transition between ways of life.

§3 NIETZSCHE'S NOTION OF REDEMPTION THROUGH SELF-OVERCOMING

What we learned in the last section and in Chapter 2 about the ascetic's attempted solution to the threat of nihilism will also be instructive here, since in several ways the solution Nietzsche suggests resembles the ascetic solution. For example, we have learned that the ascetic fights nihilism with a revaluation of values and the formulation of a new kind of conscience. Likewise, Nietzsche's solution involves a revaluation of values and the formulation of a new kind of conscience. But Nietzsche aims to succeed precisely where the ascetic failed *from the start*; Nietzsche aims to address the problem of nihilism at its root, in the stance of *ressentiment* by which one turns against oneself and against life. Therefore Nietzsche proposes that we develop a life-affirming sovereign conscience rather than a life-denying guilty conscience and he calls for a new revaluation of values to liberate us from both universal or world-renouncing values, thereby making possible a truly individual and life-affirming way of life. Importantly, this transformation represents the *self-overcoming* of ascetic morality in that it turns the 'unnatural instincts' against themselves, turning pity against pity and guilt against guilt, as I will explain shortly. The result is not just the eradication of the conflict of nihilism within (or between) these instincts, although that also happens. The more important result is that a new, instinctive, sovereign conscience is "forged", a conscience comprising a self-affirming sense of self-reverence and self-responsibility.

As with the last section, a basic account of the transformation to be traced here has already been given in Chapter 2. In particular, I have already addressed at length two of the main components of this transformation: a new revaluation of values and the formation of a new kind of conscience. These components, along with independence, constitute the defining features of Nietzsche's ideal as I have presented it. Yet it is not yet clear how these efforts to overcome the ascetic way of life represent the *self-overcoming* of this way of life. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche talks about the possibility of ushering in a new "extra-moral" period in history that would involve overcoming "morality in the traditional sense" (*BGE*:62). In the same passage Nietzsche claims that this task will be the

work of his ideal 'higher types', but he also claims that it represents a kind of self-overcoming on behalf of ascetic morality: "The overcoming of morality, in a certain sense even the self-overcoming of morality: let this be the name for that long secret work which has been saved up for the finest and most honest, also the most malicious, consciences of today (*BGE*:32). I think the best way we can make sense of these two claims is to understand that the life Nietzsche takes to be ideal represents the self-overcoming of the ascetic way of life; Nietzsche calls on his higher types to have a conscience against the influence of ascetic ideals still present *within themselves*. While Nietzsche sometimes heralds this transformation away from ascetic ideals as a great historical and sociological event, the ushering in of an "extra moral period," it is also clear that is this transformation is primarily a self-transformation on the part of certain individuals. Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche is interested in bringing about a transformation within the person suffering from internal collapse. Whatever grander sociological and historical changes Nietzsche hopes will occur, they are all dependent on this personal type of self-transformation.

Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche is interested in using the destructive forces at work within this internal collapse to bring about a final end to this internal collapse. This is one of the primary ways in which the transformation Nietzsche advocates involves a self-overcoming of the ascetic life. For example, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche suggests that we can turn the ascetic value of pity against itself. His strategy of turning pity against pity involves cultivating a sense of pity for all that is destroyed or diminished by the pampering and weakening effects of pity, e.g., the creative, proud, joyful instincts:

> In man, *creature* and *creator* are united: in man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine spectator and the seventh day—do you understand this antithesis? And that *your* pity is for the "creature in man," for that which has to be formed, broken, forged, torn, burned, annealed, refined—that which has to *suffer* and *should* suffer? And *our* pity—do you not grasp whom our *opposite* pity is for

> when it defends itself against your pity as the worst of all pampering and weakening?— Pity *against* pity, then! (*BGE*:225)

Pity against pity represents the self-overcoming of ascetic ideals insofar as pity is an ascetic ideal that is now be turned against the ascetic stance and specifically against the ascetic value of pity. Another example of this pattern of self-overcoming involves the value of truthfulness. Although a full discussion of Nietzsche's thoughts on 'the will to truth' lies beyond the scope of this study, it is worth exploring how Nietzsche thinks the self-overcoming of ascetic morality can be accomplished by means of the ascetic value of truth. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche asks "What, in all strictness, has really conquered the Christian God?" (*GM* III:27) In answering, Nietzsche refers us back to a passage from *The Gay Science* in which he claims that the Christian value for truth, especially in relation to one's conscience, has become the "scientific" conscience, the demand for "intellectual cleanliness at any price" (GS:344). The result is that the "mendaciousness, feminism, weakness, and cowardice" of the ascetic interpretation of existence now has "man's conscience *against* it" and "is considered indecent and dishonest by every more refined conscience" (GS:344). The severity of this conscience, a severity and devotion to truth honored in the ascetic stance, now works against the ascetic stance insofar as it discovers the falsity and cowardice at work in this stance. Nietzsche leaves no doubt about the importance of this development or about its nature as a form of self-overcoming: "In this severity, if anywhere, we are *good* Europeans and heirs of Europe's longest and most courageous self-overcoming" (GS:357). When Nietzsche quotes this passage in the *Genealogy* he adds the following commentary by way of further explaining the nature of this self-overcoming:

> All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming: thus the law of life will have it, the law of the necessity of 'self-overcoming' in the nature of life – the lawgiver himself receives the call: '*patere legem, quam ipse tulisti*." [Submit to the law you yourself proposed.] In this way Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality; in this same way Christianity as morality must now perish, too:

> we stand on the threshold of this event. After Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its *most striking inference*, its inference *against* itself; this will happen, however, when it poses the question "*what is the meaning of all will to truth?* (*GM* III:27)

As this passage indicates, the standard by which ascetic morality fails and "must perish" is its own standard, in this case that of truthfulness. The demand for truthfulness, and in particular the demand that we search our consciences for the truths about our motives, is premised on a supposedly transcendent basis in the ascetic life. Truth is demanded by God, or by an unchanging, universal moral law (e.g., Kant's categorical imperative). Personally, Nietzsche is ambivalent about whether 'truth at any price' really should be held as valuable in this way, but this is not his argument here. Instead, he merely shows that asceticism must submit to its own demand for truthfulness and the conscientious examination of one's motives and intentions for upholding the ascetic stance and its value of truthfulness. Doing so, it eventually prompts the kinds of discoveries that Nietzsche himself works to bring to light, e.g., that the demand for truth does not have a transcendent basis, or that the basis for ascetic values which condemn any expression of worldly will to power is itself a form of worldly will to power. These are realizations the person living the ascetic way of life cannot absorb without facing the demise of this way of life, since the ascetic stance demands that our values have a transcendent basis, that they be universally 'good' regardless of particular interests of desires.

Moreover, for this very same reason one might be tempted to give up belief in values altogether. Maintaining the demand for a transcendent basis for values if anything is to be considered truly valuable, but facing the impossibility of meeting this demand, one may slip into a state of the pessimistic nihilism in which nothing seems valuable. In his unpublished notes Nietzsche writes of the kind of nihilism reached by this self-defeating structure of ascetic values: "'Everything lacks meaning' (the untenability of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the

suspicion that all interpretations of the world are false" (WP:3). Defining this kind of nihilism, Nietzsche writes: "What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devaluate themselves*. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (WP I:2). As the language of this quote suggests, the kind of nihilism Nietzsche is worried about here is what he describes as "pessimistic" nihilism or "suicidal nihilism" in the published works. Nietzsche suggests that living the ascetic way of life and pursuing ascetic values and interpretations eventually leads to the collapse of this way of life and to the kind of nihilism in which we find nothing valuable. But Nietzsche has hopes for an alternative outcome to this internal collapse: we could instead abandon the demand that our values have a transcendent basis and accept that ethical values have their basis in 'this' life. In this case, the internal collapse of the ascetic conception of values could be turned into a benefit, allowing for a more life-affirming and individual way of holding values.

In the *Genealogy*, we find a similar pattern of self-overcoming in the inversion of the ascetic's 'bad conscience' that Nietzsche hails as a form of "redemption." Instead of turning pity against pity, or having an intellectual conscience against false representations of the value of truthfulness, he now calls on us to overthrow the ascetic form of conscience altogether – and to do so utilizing this conscience itself. Specifically he calls us to turn guilt against guilt, to have feelings of guilt at the pernicious, self-destructive guilty conscience promoted by the ascetic stance. He calls on a "redeeming man of great love and contempt" to liberate us from the ascetic guilty conscience and the underlying mutually antagonistic instincts of the 'bad conscience':

> Man has all too long had an "evil eye" for his natural inclinations, so that they have finally become inseparable from his "bad conscience." An attempt at the reverse would *in itself* be possible—but who is strong enough for it?—that is, to wed the bad conscience to all the *unnatural* inclinations, all those aspirations to the beyond, to that which runs counter to sense, instinct, nature, animal, in short all ideals hitherto, which are one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world. (*GM* II:24)

As I suggested in Chapter 2, what emerges out of this reversal of the bad conscience is the possibility of an independent, sovereign conscience, one which maintains all the inner strength and resolve of the ascetic life while basing this strength and resolve on a stance of self-reverence rather than a stance of self-renunciation. Nietzsche suggests that we can turn the destructive force of the nihilistic ascetic conscience against itself, destroying it while at the same time inheriting from it something transformed and life-affirming. Moreover, Nietzsche is clear that we could not overcome the ascetic conscience without utilizing the self-doubting and destructive forces within this conscience. Nietzsche declares: "We modern men are the heirs of the conscience-vivisection and self-torture of millennia: this is what we have practiced longest, it is our distinctive art perhaps, and in any case our subtlety in which we have acquired a refined taste" (*GM* II:24). It is clearly this skill that makes the reversal of the ascetic conscience possible: those suffering the need to examine their consciences and to torture themselves with guilt cannot help but face the pernicious, resentful and mendacious basis of the ascetic guilty conscience when it is revealed (e.g., by Nietzsche) and to condemn the ascetic stance according to ascetic values. For example, the perniciousness of the ascetic stance must be condemned by the ascetic value of pity, the resentful nature of this stance must be condemned by the ascetic value of love and forgiveness, and the mendacious nature of this stance must be condemned by the ascetic value of truthfulness. In this way we can see that the ascetic way of life fails by its own standards, whether of not this is consciously realized by a person living this life. One of Nietzsche's tasks is to try to make this failure more evident, but I think his more pressing task is to show how this failure emerges from a more fundamental failure within the ascetic stance. As I will discuss in detail later, Nietzsche primary criticism of ascetic morality is not the hypocritical contradiction between its values and its motivations or even the fact that the values of the ascetic life condemn the one living this life. These contradictions are the results of the more

fundamental self-conflict within the agent resulting in the need to develop values that are contrary to, or condemning of, himself.

There are several other ways that this transformation utilizes what has been inherited by the long reign of ascetic ideals. Nietzsche credits the influence of ascetic ideals for the development of personal depth, spirituality, and a sense of beauty (*GM* III:9, *GM* II:18). As Nietzsche says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the constraints of ascetic morality have "*educated* the spirit": "the European spirit was disciplined in its strength, ruthless curiosity and subtle flexibility" (*BGE*:188). Moreover, it is only under ascetic ideals that we develop a strong conscience, including the value for truthfulness as well as the above-mentioned art of "conscience-vivisection." All of these are prerequisites for the kind of transformation Nietzsche calls us to make, and all of these developments remain in some transfigured form in the life he takes to be ideal. In order to see why it is so important for Nietzsche that the overcoming of ascetic stance be a self-overcoming of this stance, drawing on the strengths and skills honed throughout "the long reign of ascetic ideals," we must now try to understand the ways in which Nietzsche understands this self-overcoming as a kind of "redemption."

The most obvious way this transformation is a "redemption" is that it rids us of ascetic nihilism insofar as we come to abandon the ascetic stance towards existence. It also rids us of the threat of pessimistic nihilism that emerged out of the ascetic stance. Thus, Nietzsche calls his "redeeming man of great love and contempt" someone "who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from *that which was bound to grow out of it*, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism" (*GM* II:24). As we have seen, this redemption takes place through the "liberation from the morality of mores" (*GM* II:2) and the revaluation of resentful, world-renouncing ascetic values. The result is an individual, life-affirming way of life, the life associated with Nietzsche's ideal figure.

But how is this personal transformation a redemption in any broader sense, a redemption of the world or of "reality" in the way Nietzsche suggests by

declaring: "he may bring home the *redemption* of this reality: its redemption from the curse that the hitherto reigning ideal has laid upon it" (*GM* II:24)? Elsewhere Nietzsche talks about redeeming "the world" by ridding it of the notion of a transcendent, perfect God who judges us according to ascetic values: "We deny God, we deny the responsibility in God: only *thereby* do we redeem the world" (*TI* "Errors" 8). But how does Nietzsche see any broader significance to the personal transformation that occurs within these higher types? A clue is provided later on this same passage, where Nietzsche calls his redeeming figure "the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man" (*GM* II:24). By becoming something strong, joyful, life-affirming and able to accomplish great things in the world, Nietzsche's ideal figure becomes a goal and source of hope for those who would otherwise sink down into a hopeless state of pessimistic nihilism. Nietzsche's ideal figure therefore serves to restore our faith in humanity. This type of redemption is precisely what Nietzsche calls his "final hope" in relation to the current threat of pessimistic nihilism:

> [G]rant me the sight, but *one* glance of something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty, triumphant, something still capable of arousing fear! Of a man who justifies *man*, of a complementary and redeeming lucky hit on the part of man for the sake of which one may still *believe in man*! (*GM* I:12)

Thus, the broader kind of redemption Nietzsche hopes for does not require that his 'highest type' proselytize any new religion or moral message to the populace. The redemption from the ascetic ideal and its "curse" of nihilism are accomplished by the visible excellence and achievements of the sovereign, creative individual. The self-transformation described above allows the kind of human excellence that can serve as a new kind of ideal for which we can strive. Nietzsche's ideal figure thereby provides the "opposing will" and "opposing goal" Nietzsche calls for to replace the ascetic ideal (*GM* III:23).

There is yet another way that the self-transformation of Nietzsche's ideal figure represents a redemption in some broader sense. In order to understand this kind of redemption and the *need* for this kind of redemption, we must understand that for Nietzsche each person embodies the whole of what has come before her as the genealogy or history that has brought her into existence or influenced her development.[107] In other words, the entire genealogy and history of which an individual is the fruit is embodied in some form within this individual. This situation presents an evident problem for the task of accepting a life-affirming stance towards oneself and existence. Given how thoroughly infected most of our genealogy and history has been with hatred, *ressentiment*, and nihilism, how could we ever affirm ourselves and life as a whole? Even Nietzsche's 'higher types' have this history and genealogy of "the long reign of ascetic ideals" within them, as a 'necessary' part of who they are. How then can Nietzsche consistently call on us to affirm the whole of existence while simultaneously calling on us to recognize this existence as thoroughly infected with all that he wants us to reject and condemn? Or, on a more personal scale, how can Nietzsche expect an individual to affirm his whole life if so much of this life has had its basis in the life-denying, self-hating, resentful instincts?

In addressing these worries, I think we can turn to Nietzsche's related notions of *amor fati* and saying 'yes' to eternal recurrence. I understand Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence – the possibility that everything in our lives gets repeated for eternity and in exactly the same way – less as a cosmological thesis than as a test for life-affirmation: if you can will that your life be repeated as a whole, exactly as it is, then you truly affirm your life as a whole. Understood as such, this 'yes'-saying in the face of the possibility of eternal recurrence expresses the same idea as *amor fati*, the love of one's fate as a whole (GS:276). Both of these concepts signify the new affirmative, 'yes'-saying stance

[107] Kathleen Higgins explains this point in relation to the notion of 'necessity' of fate involved in Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati*, which will be discussed shortly. Kathleen Higgins, *Comic Relief*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 147.

that Nietzsche takes to be ideal. But I think they also play a role in Nietzsche's notion of redemption through self-overcoming. A proper understanding of these concepts reveals that the kind of life-affirming stance Nietzsche calls us to take does not require that we accept and affirm each particular aspect of existence. As Kathleen Higgins suggests, affirming one's life in the mode of *amor fati* and saying 'yes' to eternal recurrence "is certainly not equivalent to surveying the moments of one's life without any thought of improvement" (Higgins, 146). Higgins points out that the idea of *amor fati* is introduced in a passage expressing a new year's resolution, and that one "makes new year's resolutions precisely in order to improve the way that one is living one's life" (Higgins, 146). Thus, we can affirm the whole of life while rejecting those particular aspects of life that are hateful, resentful or nihilistic.

Yet it is not clear that these replies are sufficient to fully address the worries expressed above. After all, the problem is not with a few particular things here and there that we would want to reject, or even with a great number of such things; rather, we face the challenge of affirming a totality which has been overwhelmingly defined, shaped, and 'infected' with what is nihilistic, hateful and full of *ressentiment*. Moreover, I think the notions of *amor fati* and saying 'yes' to eternal recurrence are not just a matter of affirming existence because *on balance* those things about existence which are healthy and life-affirming somehow outweigh, if not in frequency of occurrence than in importance, those things that are hateful and nihilistic. I think Nietzsche expresses the gravity of these worries and the greater potential for affirmation in a discussion about the "sickness" of the nihilistic will to find oneself guilty:

> Here is sickness, beyond any doubt, the most terrible sickness that has ever raged in man; and whoever can still bear to hear (but today one no longer has ears for this!) how in this night of torment and absurdity there has resounded the cry of *love*, the cry of the most most nostalgic rapture, of redemption through *love*, will turn away, seized by invincible horror. – There is so much in man that is hideous! – Too long, the earth has been a madhouse! – (*GM* II:22)

I think we can interpret Nietzsche's reference to "redemption through love" as alluding to the Christian notion of redemption through God's love and forgiveness. If so, then Nietzsche mentions it as an additional irony, since he interprets the Christian notion of love to be not the antithesis but the epitome and "crown" of the ascetic stance and its seething *ressentiment* (*GM* I:8). Alternately, I think we can interpret Nietzsche's reference to "redemption through love" as an allusion to the kind of redemption he himself hopes for, and perhaps specifically to redemption through the love of *amor fati*. I think the key to understanding *amor fati* in this way is to view it in relation to the self-overcoming of the ascetic stance. As I have shown, the transformation that brings about Nietzsche's ideal way of living depends upon a number of developments, skills, and strengths that are only gained ("inherited") from the history of ascetic ideals. This transformation involves making something excellent and life-affirming out of this inheritance, using the negative life-denying aspects of the ascetic stance to both end this stance and bring about an excellent replacement. As such, I think we can understand that Nietzsche's ideal figure "redeems" and "justifies" the whole of history of ascetic ideals by making something out of it, by utilizing it as a necessary means to a "higher" "more spiritual" way of life. He thereby prevents our genealogy and history from being 'in vain'; in fact, he makes it valuable and *justifiable* precisely by making it into a means to something life-affirming and excellent.

Here we see the significance of Nietzsche's repeated insistence that ascetic morality ends not just by a process of overcoming, but by a process of *self-overcoming*.[108] On one hand we might sees this insistence as a response to a practical concern: since Nietzsche assumes that we are thoroughly dominated by

[108] This point also shows another reason why it is important for Nietzsche that his ideal not be simply represent a return to the way of life of the ancient 'masters'. Although his ideal may be closer to the masterly way of life than the slavish/ascetic way of life that replaced it, a return to the life of the masters would signal that the whole history since the first 'slave revolt in values' has been in vain. A reversion to the way of life of the ancient masters is not only impossible (*TI* "Expeditions" 43), but it is not even *desirable*; as we have seen, much of what makes Nietzsche's best way of life excellent depends upon its inheritance from the ascetic life of which it is the self-overcoming.

ascetic ideals, he must also assume that these are materials we will have to work with in developing any new, higher way of life. But it may also be that Nietzsche foresees the need to affirm *in some way* the dominance of ascetic ideals he now wants to overthrow. We can say 'yes' to our fate and affirm life as a whole not *despite* the sickness and nihilism of our past, but in an important sense *because* of it: without it, we could never develop the ideal life Nietzsche calls us to live. This is precisely the kind of affirmation Nietzsche associates with *amor fati* in *Ecce Homo*:

> My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it – all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary – but *love* it. (*EH* "Clever" 10)

As my account implies, we can affirm the whole of life only once we have begun to turn the ascetic stance into something higher; doing so justifies and makes affirmable for the first time much of our history and much of who we are. This conclusion recalls Nietzsche's thoughts on 'great health' by which he means not the absence of anything unhealthy but the fundamentally healthy ability to turn even weakness and sickness into sources of strength. Nietzsche calls us to *make something* out of our long sickness of ascetic ideals, to make of this sickness a pregnancy by which something great and life-affirming is born. Likewise, this conclusion recalls Nietzsche's famous dictum that "whatever does not kill me makes me stronger" (*TI*: 'Maxims' 8). Of course, taken as a general maxim, this idea is patently false. But the phrase with which Nietzsche begins of this maxim ("From the military school of life") may already indicate that it is not meant for everyone. Furthermore, when we consider how this phrase is presented in *Ecce Homo*, we realize that the situation it names is part of the self-strengthening or self-replenishing existential stance Nietzsche identifies only with his ideal way of life: "He guesses what remedies avail against what is harmful; he exploits bad accidents to his advantage; what does not kill him makes him stronger" (*EH*

'Wise' 2). In other words, I think this dictum only applies to those with 'great health' and even then it applies less as a prediction of fact than as an indication of one's general stance of openness, creativity and resiliency in the face of all that life brings with it.[109]

The existential stance Nietzsche's identifies with his ideal figure allows this figure to benefit where he can from misfortunes, but more significantly it allows him to benefit from all that the ascetic stance rejects and condemns. This idea is confirmed by Nietzsche's description of "that economy in the law of life" that is open to finding advantage in everything the ascetic morality rejects (natural strengths, joy, pride, etc.) as well as in the ascetic stance itself (through its self-overcoming, including the self-overcoming of moralists into Nietzsche's 'immoralists') (*TI*: 'Morality' 6). This openness is part of the self-strengthening 'economy' or cycle at work within Nietzsche's ideal way of life in which a fundamentally affirming stance towards oneself and the world leads to accomplishments in the world which further justify this affirmation. Such a self-strengthening or self-replenishing cycle within a way of life contrasts with the self-conflicted disharmonious cycle of nihilism, in which a person loathes and attacks himself, thereby making himself weaker, thereby making himself more loathsome. One might say that the self-overcoming Nietzsche hopes for aims at reversing the direction of this cycle, creating a self-strengthening stance toward life, one that benefits both from the long reign of ascetic ideals and from everything that these ideals rejected and condemned.

§4 INTERNAL COLLAPSE VS. INTERNAL CRITIQUE

I think Nietzsche's notion of nihilism has value as an ethical concept for the same reasons that Kierkegaard's notion of despair has this value. First, nihilism describes a kind of ethical failure that is much more fundamental than we find in the notion of a singular act of wrongdoing or an isolated vice. For

[109] Nietzsche ends the passage just quoted by claiming this description applies to himself. So maybe we should take the singularity of his statement 'whatever does not kill *me* makes *me* stronger' more seriously.

Nietzsche, ethical failure takes place at the level of one's whole way of life. More specifically, it is the failure within one's existential stance toward oneself, others and the world which manifests itself in the more particular kinds of failures condemned by other approaches to ethics (acts of wrongdoing, or vices). I think we can find in Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism further support for my central thesis about Nietzsche's ethical project: unless we understand that Nietzsche is concerned to analyze and evaluate different ways of life considered as a whole, we can understand neither his notion of nihilism (or decadence), nor his hopes for some kind of redemption through self-overcoming. I believe we can understand what is declining and what must be overcome in order to reverse the direction of this decline only if we understand that Nietzsche's ethical project focuses on ways of life, not particular actions or even particular 'drives' or character traits.

Secondly, I think that Nietzsche's notion of nihilism as a kind of internal collapse allows for an evaluative analysis of these different ways of life without the need for some kind of independent standard of evaluation existing outside any of these ways of life and their modes of valuation. Nietzsche need not rely on his own prejudices and value-judgments in taking ascetic morality 'mercilessly to task'. He can rely on the values of ascetic morality itself to condemn the motivations behind this morality; more substantially, he can analyze the structure of desperate inner conflict which gives rise to self-condemning moral beliefs. Thus, Nietzsche can give us grounds for overthrowing ascetic morality and overcoming the ascetic stance without needing to formulate some other supposedly universal evaluative standard; the ascetic life is condemnable by its own standards and it collapses from the force of its own internal conflict.

I have suggested that Nietzsche's notion of nihilism has strong parallels with Kierkegaard's notion of despair in that they both describe the internal collapse of a way of life. To my knowledge, this reading has not yet been suggested by scholars of either thinker. But there is nothing new in the idea that

Nietzsche's 'attack' on Christian/ascetic morality involves some kind of internal criticism of this morality; as he have seen, the texts themselves bear this out. Walter Kaufmann establishes what may be the standard view of Nietzsche's internal critique in his book *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*. Yet there are other scholars who object to putting any emphasis on the idea of an internal problem within ascetic morality. Brian Leiter, for example, believes that Nietzsche's only real concern is with his "nascent higher human beings" and that Nietzsche is critical of traditional morality only because it harms or hinders the flourishing these higher types, not because it fails internally (Leiter, 174-177).[110] Leiter gives a series of arguments against the "internal critique interpretation" of Nietzsche that he finds in Kaufmann's work, as well as in the work of Raymond Geuss and Phillipa Foot. In concluding this chapter, I will address Leiter's objections, but I will also show some differences between my reading of nihilism as internal collapse and these other notions of 'internal critique.' I will end by saying a few words about the usefulness of an 'internal critique' of Nietzsche when faced with some of Nietzsche's more problematically resentful passages.

Kaufmann claims that the revaluation of values Nietzsche hopes for in the future constitutes an "internal criticism: the discovery of what Nietzsche variously refers to as 'mendaciousness,' 'hypocrisy,' and 'dishonesty.' (Kaufmann, 111-112). Kaufmann thinks that this revaluation simply involves the realization of the inconsistencies within traditional morality, inconsistencies that are already destroying this morality. In his view, Nietzsche "points out how our accepted morality is dying of internal inconsistencies. His No consists in the acceptance of a *fait accompli*. The philosopher only lays bare the cancerous growth" (Kaufmann, 112). Yet Kaufmann also seems to suggest that the work Nietzsche does to reveal this 'cancerous growth' of inconsistencies has some role to play in bringing about an end to this morality, claiming that Nietzsche provides "a sudden and terrifying illumination about the true nature of our

[110] Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, (New York: Routledge, 2002).

traditional values – an illumination which these values cannot survive" (Kaufmann, 113). In either case, Kaufmann is clear that Nietzsche is not criticizing traditional morality by his own standards of value or by any external standard whatsoever; rather, he is pointing out how traditional morality fails "*by its own standards*":

> The revaluation is thus the alleged discovery that our morality is, *by its own standards*, poisonously immoral: that Christian love is the mimicry of impotent hatred; that most unselfishness is but a particularly vicious form of selfishness; and that *ressentiment* is at the core of our morals. (Kaufmann, 113)

Raymond Geuss gives a parallel account in his book *The Idea of a Critical Theory*.[111] Geuss says that Nietzsche gives a "genetic" criticism of Christianity in the sense that this is a criticism of the "'origin' of Chrisitianity – that Christianity arises from hatred, envy, resentment, and feelings of weakness and inadequacy" (Geuss, 44). Geuss assumes that Nietzsche's account of this origin of Christianity is not meant to be a historical account of the origin of Christianity, since Geuss finds that "it is unclear what critical import such a statement could have" (Geuss, 44). Instead, Geuss thinks that Nietzsche's account names the origin of Christianity *within* each adherent, aiming "to make a general statement about the typical motivation of Christians" (Geuss, 44). Like Kaufmann, Geuss emphasizes that Nietzsche's criticism of these motivations need not be based on Nietzsche's own standards, since these motivations for Christianity are condemnable by Christianity's own standards:

> Nietzsche, in presenting this criticism, need not himself be committed to the view that hatred is in general, or always, or even ever an unacceptable motive for action. It is sufficient for the critical enterprise that the Christian cannot acknowledge hatred as an acceptable motive for beliefs, preferences, and attitudes. Since it is a central doctrine of Christianity that agents ought to be motivated by love, and not by hatred, resentment,

[111] Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

> envy, etc, Christianity itself gives the standard of 'acceptability' for motives in the light of which it is critiqued. (Geuss, 44)

In her essay "Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values," Phillipa Foot is generally in agreement with Leiter that the revaluation of values Nietzsche calls for is meant to serve the interests of Nietzssche's higher types, that it is "for the sake of the 'higher' man that the values of Christian morality must be abandoned, and it is from this perspective that the revaluation of values takes place" (Foot, 162).[112] Nonetheless, Foot points out that Nietzsche attacks Christianity on several grounds. First, she thinks Nietzsche is suggesting that "what is praised as Christian virtue is largely a sham, and that true goodwill would be produced not by teaching the morality of compassion but rather by encouraging 'a healthy egoism'" (Foot, 159). Secondly, Foot claims that Nietzsche "is saying that judged by its own aims this morality is bad. Men suffer pity as a sickness, and by their pity they do more harm than good" (Foot, 159). To some extent these critiques match the pattern of "internal criticism" found in Kaufmann and Geuss. But rather than saying that Christian morality is *self-condemning* in that its typical motivations are condemnable by its own standards, Foot says that Christian morality is *self-defeating* in that its aims of promoting 'goodwill' and benefits to others are contrary to the means it employs in promoting these ends. Compassion and pity do not express or promote goodwill or provide benefits to others. Just the reverse: in Nietzsche's account, compassion and pity express resentment and hatred, and only serve to harm those whom it affects. Foot suggests that Nietzsche's proposed 'healthy egoism', although it is condemned by a morality of compassion, would do a much better job of promoting and expressing this goodwill and of actually benefiting others.

In opposing what he calls these 'internal critique' interpretations of Nietzsche, Leiter cites these the above-mentioned works and develops three arguments against the idea that Nietzsche critiques ascetic morality (what Leiter

[112] Phillipa Foot, "Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values" in Robert Solomon, *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), 156-168.

calls "MPS" – morality in a pejorative sense) "on the grounds that its own proclaimed standards (e.g. 'love one another') require a condemnation of MPS itself given its typical motives (e.g., hatred)" (Leiter, 174). His first argument claims that this view is guilty of a kind of genetic fallacy. Just because ascetic morality arose out of resentment and hatred does not mean that it still arises from these motivations, and "only if MPS is still motivated by hatred would it seem that a "morality of love" would have any reason to condemn itself" (Leiter, 174). Leiter makes a good point that revealing hatred and *ressentiment* as the *historical* origins of ascetic morality may be embarrassing for this morality, but *by itself* such a historical account does not reveal anything about the motivations behind ascetic morality today. Nietzsche himself warns against making this kind of genetic fallacy (*GM* II:12, GS:345). Those scholars who think Nietzsche is presenting an internal critique of present day morality would have to show that according to Nietzsche this morality is still motivated by hatred and *ressentiment*. Contrary to this view, Leiter makes the surprising claim that "it is not at all clear from the text of the *Genealogy* that he is claiming that present-day morality is motivated by hatred or *ressentiment"* (Leiter, 174).

Although this claim is perhaps true in a strictly literal sense, I think it is surprising because it seems to go against the whole tenor of the *Genealogy*. Although Nietzsche may not come right out and *tell* us that our morality is still thoroughly infected with *ressentiment*, this is certainly implied in several points throughout the book. I think that Nietzsche is not *so* subtle that this point could be missed by any careful reader. For example, Nietzsche declares that he finds "palpable today" "bearers of the oppressive instincts that thirst for reprisal" (*GM* I:11), and he calls moralists of his day (like Eugene Dühring) "men of *ressentiment*" (*GM* III:14). He also declares that the ascetic mode of valuation, in which there "rules a *ressentiment* without equal" "does not die out" but is rather "one of the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena" (*GM* III:11).

To give another example, in his dramatic conclusion of the first essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche tells us that the struggle between the "*opposing* values,"

the noble versus the ascetic mode of valuation, is "as yet undecided" in some places today. Nietzsche chooses as the "symbol" of this struggle "Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome" and he makes clear that Judea can still symbolize the ascetic mode of valuation because the Jews were "the priestly nation of *ressentiment par excellence*" (*GM* I:16). Moreover, Nietzsche is clear that *ressentiment* is not strictly an ancient phenomenon. Nietzsche calls the Protestant Reformation, the values of which were still prevalent in Nietzsche's day (as he knew all-too-well), a "*ressentiment* movement" (*GM* I:16). Also, Nietzsche complains that with the shining exception of Napoleon, the "popular instincts of *ressentiment*" triumphed in the French Revolution. Nietzsche ends the essay by implying that unless "the ancient fire" of noble ideas that Napoleon represented is rekindled, we will be left with the enduring "triumph" of *ressentiment* (*GM* I:17). Nietzsche reveals that his polemic aim is to keep this from happening by getting us to "will" and "promote" that which opposes this triumph of *ressentiment* (*GM* I:17). It would be very hard to read these passages without concluding that in Nietzsche's view the morality he opposes is *still* a morality of *ressentiment*.

We reach the same conclusion if we consider what it is that is named by *ressentiment*. In the passage just cited, Nietzsche identifies *ressentiment* with "the will to the lowering, the abasement, the leveling and the decline and twilight of mankind" (*GM* I:16). From what we have already learned in this chapter, we know this description matches perfectly the crisis of nihilism Nietzsche thinks we face today. More specifically, *ressentiment* as Nietzsche describes it is not simply the motivation of vengefulness, it is the internal state of someone whose natural aggressive instincts cannot be vented in actuality so they vent themselves inwardly (against themselves) or indirectly against others and the world (*GM* I:10). *Ressentiment* is the state of internal war against oneself ("anarchy of the instincts," "instincts that are mutually antagonistic, "the bad conscience") and the state of indirect, cowardly, or "spiritualized" war against others and against existence itself (e.g., through world-renouncing ascetic values). Understood as

such, we can readily see that Nietzsche believes our current morality to be a morality of *ressentiment*, since these are precisely the conditions Nietzsche sees prevalent in our values today.

It seems Leiter's reading may get some support from the fact that Nietzsche often complains not about the passionate hatefulness and vengefulness behind contemporary values, but about their expression of an utter *lack* of passion and will. But I have already shown that both this sort of weary pessimistic nihilism and the more passionate ascetic nihilism are based most fundamentally in same the physiological or psychological state of *ressentiment* described above: they are both expressions of the fact that one is at war with oneself and existence. This may be a 'low-level civil war' within a person whose pettiness and self-abnegation lead to a state of mediocrity, or it may be an 'all-out civil war' of the ascetic whose lust for self-torment and hatred of reality reach more passionate heights. In either case, *ressentiment* is present in the instincts turned against themselves, and Nietzsche leaves no doubt that this state of *ressentiment* is precisely what he (still) finds objectionable in ascetic values today.

Leiter is right to worry about the genetic fallacy since Nietzsche maintains that it is often the case that "the cause and origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart" (*GM* II:12). But consider that for there to be a genealogy of something, this something must persist in some form or another throughout this genealogy, e.g. in the genealogy of punishment the practices of punishment remain relatively stable while the meanings and uses of these practices change throughout history. What is it that remains relatively stable throughout the genealogy of morals? On one hand, it is the values of ascetic/slavish morality, 'unegoistic,' world-renouncing values. But Nietzsche is clear that what persists behind these values, and what explains their continued persistence, is the internal state of *ressentiment*. Thus, Nietzsche declares that the various meanings and manifestations of the ascetic stance testifies to the enduring need for this stance, namely as a response to the inability to vent one's will in actuality: "That

the ascetic ideal has meant so many things to man, however, is an expression of the basic fact of the human will, its *horror vacui*: *it needs a goal* – and it will rather will *nothingness* than *not* will" (*GM* III:1). This "basic fact of the human will," the situation within the agent such that there is the *need* to will nothingness rather than not will at all, is precisely the situation of *ressentiment* in which instincts that cannot be vented outwardly in action must be vented in some other way.

Leiter's second argument against the internal critique interpretation of Nietzsche is somewhat more convincing, if also less damning. Leiter claims that "while Nietzsche clearly wants his readers to appreciate the irony that a morality of 'love' should have its origins in hatred, careful examination of Nietzsche's texts reveals that he does not seize upon this contradiction (even in the *Genealogy*) in mounting his criticism of MPS" (Leiter, 174-5). In a footnote, Leiter immediately adds two qualifications to this argument which serve to weaken it significantly. First, Leiter acknowledges that Nietzsche does sometimes emphasize a contradiction between the principles advocated by morality and the motivations for this morality. Leiter cites a passage from *The Gay Science* as evidence for this: "the fundamental contradiction in the morality that is very prestigious nowadays: the motives of this morality stand opposed to its principles" (GS:21). But Leiter insists that the context of this passage makes it clear that the contradiction Nietzsche has in mind here is in no way central to his criticism of this morality. According to Leiter, the fact that the 'unegoistic' is praised for egoistic reasons is not central to Nietzsche's *criticism* of these ideals: he does not dwell on this hypocrisy or contradiction in pressing his case against ascetic ideals. Furthermore Leiter claims that this is not the "'contradiction' commentators have in mind when they attribute an internal critique to Nietzsche," and Leiter cites Geuss as an example (Leiter, 175 fn).

Although Leiter is right to say this is not the contradiction Geuss has in mind, it is clearly one of the contradictions Kaufmann has in mind. Kaufmann's lists as one of the self-condemning contradictions of ascetic morality "that most unselfishness is but a particularly vicious form of selfishness" (Kaufmann, 113).

But Leiter's overall point in this second argument is a good one. In general, Nietzsche's criticism of ascetic morality does not center on the mendacious, hypocritical contradiction between the motivations of this morality and its own principles, although he does occasionally point out this hypocrisy and mendaciousness. Where Leiter goes wrong is in inferring from this fact that Nietzsche is not primarily interested in problems internal to ascetic morality, just that ascetic morality harms nascent higher types. Here I think we can make an important distinction between the notion of an internal critique, in which contradictions between motives and principles are exploited for argumentative purposes, and internal collapse, which describes a way of life fundamentally at odds with itself. Nietzsche only occasionally employs an internal critique when arguing against ascetic morality. But as we have seen in this chapter, Nietzsche is very much interested in revealing the internal collapse of the ascetic way of life.

The internal contradiction within the ascetic life is not primarily a matter of "'mendaciousness,' 'hypocrisy,' and 'dishonesty," contrary to what Kaufmann suggests (Kaufmann, 113). Contradictions between principles and actual motives are just the results and *symptoms* of the deeper inner contradiction within the agent and between the agent's instincts. As I hope to have shown in this chapter, Nietzsche's primary criticism of the ascetic morality is that it is an expression of nihilism, the inner conflict within an organism that takes sides against itself. We could say that Nietzsche's central problem with ascetic morality is not that its principles can be shown to contradict each other, or that they condemn the motives for holding these principles, but that this morality represents a fundamentally self-conflicted and self-condemning existential stance. In other words, the internal problem with ascetic morality is much more immediate and fundamental than advocates of the internal critique interpretations seem to realize. The hypocrisy and theoretical contradictions within the ascetic stance are results of the nihilistic self-conflict within this stance. The real problem is not that one fails to live up to ideals of pity,

selflessness and the like; the real problem is that one holds these values in the first place, that one *needs* to hold them because one needs to lash out at oneself and life through one's values. It is the state of self-conflict, not the expression of this self-conflict a hypocritical or self-condemning morality, that marks the true danger and failure of the ascetic life.

Leiter's second qualification to his argument points to the passages in which Nietzsche explains how ascetic morality "self-destructs" by means of the ascetic value for truthfulness. Leiter acknowledges the importance of this idea for Nietzsche, but insists that it does not amount to an internal critique of ascetic morality since this morality "is criticized from a broadly 'scientific' and 'truth-seeking' standpoint, a standpoint which is *not* internal to Christian morality, but which Christian morality helped produce" (Leiter, 175n). In reply, one might quibble with the claim that for Nietzsche the 'scientific' 'truth-seeking' standpoint is not really internal to Christian morality even if this morality helped to produce it. Nietzsche is quite clear that most of what constitutes the 'scientific' 'truth-seeking' standpoint of his own day is not just a *product* of ascetic morality, but is in fact "*the latest and noblest form of it*" (*GM* III:23). More importantly, Nietzsche repeatedly insists that the process by which ascetic morality is brought down by its own value of truthfulness is a process of "self-overcoming" (GS:357, *GM* III:27, *EH* "Destiny" 3). If the truthfulness which accomplishes this destruction were not internal to ascetic morality, how would this process be a case of "self-overcoming"?

The more decisive reply to Leiter builds on the distinction between internal collapse and internal critique just established. Nietzsche does not criticize ascetic morality for having a value that undermines this morality; if anything, he welcomes this situation. In point of fact, Nietzsche sees himself as the *embodiment* of this situation: it is through him that the value of truthfulness he has inherited from the reign of ascetic ideals is used to reveal the internal collapse within these ideals: "The self-overcoming of morality out of truthfulness, the self-overcoming of the moralist into his opposite—into *me*—that

is what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth." (*EH* 'Destiny' 3) Although Nietzsche might be most worried about the 'sickness' of this internal collapse infecting nascent higher types, he clearly thinks that it is important to reveal the internal conflict within the ascetic stance. We are prepared to understand the strengths of will and conscience needed by these higher types, and the redeeming self-overcoming of ascetic morality that they represent, only when we recognize the internal collapse of nihilism at work in both ascetic morality and slavish mediocrity.

This brings us to Leiter's third and final argument against the internal critique interpretation. Leiter claims that "one typical interest of an internal criticism of any view is that it should force those who hold the view to reconsider their commitment" (Leiter, 175n). But according to Leiter this is not one of Nietzsche's interests: "Nietzsche is explicit that this is *not* his aim: he does not want to force the majority of people (the 'herd' as he often calls them) to abandon MPS; to the contrary, he claims that MPS is, indeed, appropriate for certain types of people" (Leiter, 175n). Leiter is surely right that Nietzsche does not want to force the majority of people to abandon ascetic morality; as I have suggested above, Nietzsche's aim is not to have his 'higher types' proselytize to the masses. But what Leiter's account generally overlooks is the fact that the "nascent higher types" that Nietzsche is concerned about are themselves at least partially under the sway of ascetic morality. They are, at best, "battlegrounds" in which the ascetic 'mode of valuation' needs to be challenged and overcome (*GM* I:16). As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Nietzsche's diagnosis of the internal collapse within the ascetic stance is meant to provide the grounds for a self-overcoming in which those under the sway of this stance use its strengths and destructive potential to bring about an end to this stance and the beginning of a more life-affirming, individual stance towards life. So not only does Nietzsche want (at least some of) his readers to "reconsider their commitment" to ascetic morality, he wants them to utilize the strengths of this commitment as part of a process of self-transformation. In general, Leiter's rigid differentiation of 'higher' and

'lower' types overlooks the fact that what Nietzsche really aims for is a self-transformation within someone with unrealized potential to be a higher type. Realizing this potential is not a matter of inevitable or natural development; it requires the kind of dramatic self-transformation I have described above.

Although I think the notion of an internal critique in Nietzsche's writings is primarily valuable as part of a broader understanding of the internal *collapse* of the way of life that Nietzsche critiques, I think the notion of an internal critique *of Nietzsche himself*, or at least of Nietzsche as an author, can be quite valuable. I ended the last chapter by showing how reading Kierkegaard in light of his own self-examination, especially his insights about the despair of resignation, yields a kind of internal critique of Kierkegaard. Truly *learning* from Kierkegaard entails being wary of some of the things Kierkegaard says. This internal critique allows us to read Kierkegaard *well* by being attentive to those places in his writings marked by resignation and despair. I think a parallel case could be made with respect to Nietzsche. I hope to have shown that overall Nietzsche's writings express a joyful, hopeful, life-affirming message. But there is no question in my mind that Nietzsche sometimes slips into a mood more reflective of *ressentiment* than of joy. For example, several of the passages about women or about Germans in *Beyond Good and Evil* and other works seem to display not just his usual passionate zest for critique but a lingering, rancorous resentment with respect to these subjects. I agree with Solomon that Nietzsche is grateful for the developments he attributes to *ressentiment* like inwardness and spirituality, and for the fact that Nietzsche was able to harness his own *ressentiment* in productive ways, namely by focusing it against the morality of *ressentiment* (turning *ressentiment* against *ressentiment*, as it were).[113] But I think that there are passages in which we find a *ressentiment* that is not this kind of 'spiritualized' and useful

[113] Robert Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103-105.

ressentiment-turned-against-itself, but rather the old-fashioned, petty, smoldering-grudge kind of *ressentiment* that Nietzsche calls us to reject.[114]

Thus, I think that learning from Nietzsche about *ressentiment* and its manifestations provides us with an internal critique by which we can discern which passages are problematically resentful. We can therefore learn to read Nietzsche *well*, and learn to 'weather his moods', by applying what he has taught us to his own writings. Far from undermining the views of either of these thinkers, the internal critique they make possible strengthens our ability to understand and evaluate their ideas for ourselves. We thereby learn from them to be the kind of individually-minded, critical readers they both long to have.

[114] For example, I think we can appreciate Nietzsche use of *ressentiment* in a passage like *GM* I:14 in which Nietzsche gets us to feel his own nausea at ascetic ideals by describing the "bad air" of the 'cave' in which ascetic ideals are "manufactured." In contrast, it is hard to see the same kind of merit in passages like BGE:147: "From old Florentine novels, moreover – from life: '*buona femmina e mala femmina vuol bastone*.' [good women and bad women need beating] Sacchetti, Nov. 86" or in BGE:232: "Woman has so much reason for shame; in woman there is concealed so much pedanticism, superficiality, schoolmarmishness, petty presumption, petty unbridledness and petty immodesty […] which has fundamentally been most effectively controlled and repressed hitherto by *fear* of man."

CHAPTER 5

CONTRASTING KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE

In this chapter I will address some of the more significant and interesting points of contrast between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that have emerged from my exposition in the previous four chapters. The exposition of despair and nihilism in the last two chapters will now be used to establish the critiques each thinker could bring to bear against the other's ideal life. In other words, we will see how Kierkegaard might accuse Nietzsche's sovereign individual of despair and how Nietzsche might accuse Kierkegaard's person of faith of nihilism. As I will show, the fact that both thinkers are asking the same fundamental question but presenting such different and opposing answers to this question opens up an interesting ethical dialogue between their respective ideas. This dialogue converges on such topics as responsibility, autonomy, guilt, and the relation between spirituality and ethics. These topics are not only greatly significant to each thinker, they also constitute the central points of disagreement between them. My point is not to end this dialogue by showing how one of these thinkers refutes or defeats the other, but to establish where the lines of disagreement in this dialogue actually lie. Only by delineating this differences clearly can we benefit from the critical insights each thinker can offer the other. It will also help to suggest the kinds of the topics and discussions that any ethics focusing on ways of life would need to address.

§1: REVIEWING OTHER STUDIES OF KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE

I will begin this chapter by addressing a number of recent and historical comparisons of these two thinkers.[115] Some of these studies have usefully

[115] I will list these studies here and thereafter refer to them parenthetically. Allastair **Hannay,** "Nietzsche/Kierkegaard: Prospects for dialogue?" *Kierkegaard: Sellected Essays,* (Routledge, 2003); James **Kellenberger**, *Kierkegaard and Nietzsche,* (MacMillan Press, 1997); Gregor **Malantschuk**, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche," Transl. Grieve, *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Johnson & Thulstrup, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1962), 116-129; John Powell **Clayton**, "Zarathustra and the Stages on Life's Way: A Nietzschean Riposte to Kierkegaard?" *Nietzsche-Studien*, 14 (1985) 179-200; Gerd-Günter **Grau**, "*Nietzsche and Kierkegaard*," Transl.

detailed particular points of intersection between the thinking of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but none have focused on the broad convergence between these thinkers in their approach to ethics as I have presented it. The motivation of many studies comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche has been to articulate how one of these thinkers might be used to attack the other. As I will demonstrate, this eagerness to find a decisive reply to one thinker in the work of the other (usually by a scholar already championing one of them) has the tendency to oversimplify and under-appreciate the work of one (and usually both) of these thinkers. In turn, these tendencies have the result of artificially closing what would otherwise be a fruitful and compelling dialogue between their ideas.

The most common problem with the Kierkegaard scholarship in these comparisons is a failure to respect the distinction between Kierkegaard's life of resignation (religiousness A) and his life of faith (religiousness B). This problem is especially conspicuous in studies which seem to champion Nietzsche over Kierkegaard (Cinelli, Hinman, Clayton, Grau), but it is appears in less biased studies as well (Jaspers, Deleuze). Jaspers presents Kierkegaard as espousing "an otherworldly Christianity which is like Nothingness and shows itself only in negation (the absurd, martyrdom) and in negative resolution" (Jaspers, 25). Later he reiterates that for Kierkegaard the leap into this Christianity is conceived as a "decision for utter world negation and martyrdom" (Jaspers, 36). In Chapter 1 we saw that Kierkegaard does not espouse an "otherworldly Christianity": Abraham has faith 'for this life' and the person of faith is joyfully present to herself in faith. Jasper's term "negative resolution" is in fact Judge Wilhelm's term for what he considers an alternate approach to the ethical life:

Wendy Rader, *Studies in Nietzsche and Judeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. O'Flaherty, et. al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 226-251; Albert **Cinelli**, "Nietzsche and Kierkegaard on Existential Affirmation," Southwest Philosophy Review, 1989; 5:135-141; Lawrence M. **Hinman**, "Temporality and Self-Affirmation. A Kierkegaardian Critique of Nietzsche's Doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same," *Kierkegaardiana* XI 1980, p. 93-119; Karl **Jaspers**, "The Origin of the Contemporary Philosophical Situation: The historical meaning of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche," in *Reason and Existenz*, Transl. Earle, 3rd Edition (New York: Noonday Press, 1955); Gilles **Deleuze**, *Difference and Repetition*, Transl. Paul Patton, (London: Athlone Press, 1994 orig. 1968), 1-27. Conrad **Bonifazi**, *Christendom Attacked: A Comparison of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche*, (London: Rockliffe, 1953); Albert **Camus**, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Transl. Justin O'Brien, (New York: Vintage, 1991, orig. 1955).

instead of the "positive resolution" (commitments to marriage and life-tasks) there is "negative resolution" (commitment to ascetic world-renunciation) (SLW, 112). As I have shown in the previous chapters, for Kierkegaard it is essential to distinguish the life of "world negation" and "negative resolution" from the life of faith, since in relation to faith such resignation is a form of intense despair. However much faith includes a 'movement' of resignation, the overall stance of faith is one of joyful acceptance of finite, everyday life.

A similar problem is found in Deleuze, where the discussion of Kierkegaard focuses on Abraham as a hero of resignation: "Job is infinite contestation and Abraham infinite resignation, but these are one and the same thing" (Deleuze, 7). Deleuze does not seem to take into account the central contrast in *Fear and Trembling* between faith and resignation. Moreover, it is unclear how Abraham's unquestioning obedience of God and Job's contestation of God could ever be "one and the same thing."

Cinelli's study suffers from a similar misunderstanding. Although he acknowledges that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche propose some sort of life-affirmation, he thinks that for Kierkegaard the finite can only be affirmed provisionally, on the basis of a hope that it will be transcended: "The knight of faith can be as comfortable as he is with the finite because his faith allows him to believe that the finite will ultimately be transcended" (Cinelli, 138). He contrasts this half-hearted life-affirmation with the "more bold" affirmation of Nietzsche (Cinelli, 138). Certainly there are interesting differences between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche regarding the basis and nature of life-affirmation, as we will discuss in greater detail later. But there are no grounds for claiming that Kierkegaard's knight of faith affirms finitude only on the absurd hope that it will be transcended; Abraham's "faith for *this* life" is not a hope that his finitude will be transcended, but that he will regain "exactly the same finitude" as a gift and task from God. For Kierkegaard, what is absurdly grasped in faith is that the transcendent makes itself manifest in the finite. This is exemplified in the

Incarnation but also in Kierkegaard's call for the person of faith to "transform the leap in life to a gait, to express the sublime in the pedestrian absolutely" (*FT*:70).

Cinelli also makes mistakes in understanding Kierkegaard's other ways of life, locating an "existential question of choice" within the aesthetic life, where it has not yet developed (*EO* II:167), and declaring that the ethical life is "enslaved to decorum" and "becomes a mere following of rules" (Cinelli, 135-6). He takes Kierkegaard's term 'finitude' to refer to these rules of decorum rather than to everyday existence in the world, as Kierkegaard uses it. On the basis of this error, he quite bizarrely groups Kierkegaard's life of resignation with Nietzsche ideal of going beyond "herd morality" (Cinelli, 140). Since he takes the life of resignation's rejection of finitude to be a rejection of these rules, the life of resignation is supposed to match with Nietzsche's life 'beyond good and evil' in which these rules are rejected.[116] In these misreadings Cinelli misses the much more obvious comparison of Kierkegaard's resignation with Nietzsche's ascetic life, since both center on world-renunciation, suffering, and the consciousness of guilt. In contrast to such world-renunciation, both Kierkegaard's life of faith and Nietzsche's life of creative sovereignty stand as positive alternatives in which one affirms everyday existence with gratitude and joy. Rather than exploring these alternatives on an equal level, Cinelli takes Kierkegaard's ideal to be a half-hearted anticipation of Nietzsche's and reaches the biased conclusion that "Kierkegaard, one can argue, puts forth his doctrine of faith because he is unable to bear what is involved with an acceptance of atheism" (Cinelli, 140).

Lawrence Hinman also stumbles over the failure to distinguish Kierkegaard's life of faith from his life of resignation, and this clouds both his comparison and his contrast of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Hinman reads Kierkegaard's Christianity as like Nietzsche's eternal recurrence in that it becomes "the greatest stress, the heaviest burden" for a person by "increasing the

[116] For different reasons, Kellenberger also identifies Nietzsche's ideal with Kierkegaard's resignation: "Kierkegaard might well have seen Zarathustra's acceptance as very like infinite resignation, for it is a matter of one's own willing effort" (Kellenberger, 122). The main mistake here, to be discussed at length later, is that Zarathustra's acceptance is less a matter of willing effort than it is a cessation of willing.

tension between the finite and the infinite" (Hinman, 115). While there is some truth to saying the Kierkegaard's Christianity is a "burden," Hinman does not address how for Kierkegaard faith offers a *relief* from this burden and *reconciles* the finite and the infinite. In fact, a harmony between the finite and the infinite as "factors" of the self is one of the defining traits of a faithful self in *The Sickness Unto Death*, as explained in my Chapter 3. This mistake translates into a mistaken conception of how Kierkegaard and Nietzsche fundamentally diverge. Hinman argues that the "fundamental point of divergence between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard" is that for Kierkegaard only God, as the "infinite and absolute," can be affirmed with infinite passion. In contrast, for Nietzsche, man can be affirmed as an infinite and absolute subject instead (Hinman, 116). Here Hinman relies on what is said from the point of view of religiousness A in the *Postscript* without considering that in faith the infinite and finite are brought together, reconciled (on the strength of the absurd), and mutually affirmed.

John Powell Clayton seems to make a similar mistake in his attempt to match Kierkegaard's highest way of life with what is symbolized by the camel in Zarathustra's 'Thee Metamorphoses.' Clayton writes that Kierkegaard's "severe" religious type is appropriately represented by this camel "as a beast of burden which falls to its knees in order to be laden" (Clayton, 190). "Willing to pay any price, bear any burden, this akward [*sic*] beast lumbers its way along life's *via dolorosa* looking for yet heavier weights to be placed upon its back" (C, 190). Again, the severity and burden of Christianity are certainly a part of Kierkegaard's ideal life of faith, but Clayton would have to consider the distinction between this burden as it manifests itself in faith and as it manifests itself in resignation. Clayton seems to have blocked this distinction by insisting that "as is well known" for Kierkegaard there are "three and only three modes of human existence or 'stages on life's way'," namely the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious (C, 185). Since Clayton identifies the 'ethical' here with the ethical life of Judge Wilhelm, he does not seem to be able to account for the difference between resignation and faith that is so important for Kierkegaard.

In Clayton we also find another mistake common to several comparisons of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the mistake of matching Nietzsche's (highest) aesthetically creative life with Kierkegaard's (lowest) aesthetic life. This suggestion may be found in a number of studies (Malantshuk, Hannay, Kellenberger)[117] but it is best represented in Clayton's work. Clayton's thesis is that each stage of Zarathustra's metamorphoses represents one of Kierkegaard's stages on life's way, but that Nietzsche presents them in reverse order as a kind of riposte to Kierkegaard. Thus, Clayton finds that Nietzsche's ideal life, symbolized by the 'baby' and the 'sacred Yes', matches with Kierkegaard's aesthetic life: "Like Kierkegaard's aesthete, this child-like 'second innocent' is governed by fate, by fortune and misfortune" (Clayton, 191). What Clayton seems to overlook is that the aesthetic life is also and primarily the hedonistic life, the life of pleasure. This dependence on the accidents of 'fate', on fortune and misfortune, is the aesthetic person's despairing inability to secure pleasure and relief from boredom. It is not the actively engaged *'amor fati'* that Nietzsche proposes, which might be better matched to the concept of "divine governance" that Kierkegaard finds governing his own authorship in *Point of View*.

In general, I think Clayton's way of contrasting Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is a false lead, one based on an equivocation regarding the term 'aesthetic.' What Nietzsche's ideal has to do with "aesthetics" is not that it is the life of enjoyment or pleasure, but rather that it involves the creation of works of art (or of oneself as something like a work of art), and Nietzsche expects that this creation may well entail a painful spiritual struggle. Nietzsche makes clear his disdain for the "pleasure-seeking and lack of conscience" of what Kierkegaard would call the aesthetic life (*D*:P4). His emphasis on "great responsibility" and "autonomy" clearly distinguish his ideal from the hedonist. Furthermore, Nietzsche applauds artists and creators for their inner strength and integrity, precisely the qualities that Kierkegaard's aesthete lacks.

[117] See Malantschuk, 124; Kellenberger, 124; and Hannay, 210,212.

A final example of a Nietzsche scholar being unfair to Kierkegaard in his comparison of the two can be found in the work of Gerd-Günter Grau. In his recent 1997 work comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, a collection of essays entitled *Venunft, Wahrheit, Glaube: Neue Studien zu Nietzsche und Kierkegaard* Grau repeats an interesting thesis he had presented at several earlier points.[118] Grau would like to see Kierkegaard's notion of faith collapse according to Nietzsche's notion of the self-dissolution of Christianity in which its value for truth is finally turned against Christianity, revealing Christianity's worldly basis (GS:357, *GM* III:27). This is an intriguing thesis, and certainly Nietzsche's notions of internal collapse can be brought to bear on Kierkegaard's life of faith in interesting ways (as we will explore later in this chapter.) But Grau starts out on the wrong foot by focusing on the issue of the "rational confirmation" "verifiability" or "proof of validity" of Kierkegaard's Christianity (Grau, 236,237,240,244,246,249,251). He portrays Kierkegaard as trying, but continually failing, to provide such a proof of validity, and *this* is what he imagines to be Kierkegaard's Christian self-dissolution.

Grau speculates on Kierkegaard's personal life in order to find evidence for the failure of Christianity to provide such a proof. He says that Kierkegaard did not get the divine intervention he had hoped for, namely giving him Regina back again "as the reward, as it were, for the 'obedience' involved in breaking it off. It is the point of his analysis in *Fear and Trembling* of the story of Abraham, who is spared the sacrifice of Isaac, that the 'father of faith' had the courage to believe in "this life," that is, to expect to receive concrete proof for his faith in the here and now" (Grau, 245-6). Grau thinks that the fact that this proof is not forthcoming is the central crisis for Kierkegaard's Christianity and the prompt for him to turn to a belief on the basis of the absurd. In reply, it seems Grau

[118] Grau first presented this thesis in his *Die Selbstauflösung des christlichen Glaubens: Eine religionsphilosophische Studie über Kierkegaard* (Franfurt am Main: Schulte-Bulmke, 1963). This thesis was published in English in his "Nietzsche and Kierkegaard" Transl. Wendy Rader, *Studies in Nietzsche and Judeo-Christian Tradition*. Eds. O'Flaherty, et. al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 198) pp.226-251, to which I make reference here. Most recently, this thesis appears in Grau's *Venunft, Wahrheit, Glaube: Neue Studien zu Nietzsche und Kierkegaard*, (Würtzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997), p. 90-94.

misunderstands *Fear and Trembling* entirely if he takes the regaining of Isaac to be "concrete proof" for Abraham's faith, as if Abraham has a *theory* that Isaac will be spared and his actually being spared is confirming evidence for this theory. For Kierkegaard, nothing could be more ridiculous than to demand or even seek 'proof' that one's faith in God is rationally justified. In fact, his position from the start is that it is not rationally justified. Moreover, it is far from clear how the ram appearing in the thicket could be taken as rational proof for Abraham's faith. For Johannes de Silentio, it is not even the sparing of Isaac that is significant, but rather the fact that Abraham receives him back with joy; he can imagine a resigned Abraham (an Abraham without faith) who is also spared Isaac, but who finds 'joy no more' in his life. Likewise, while Kierkegaard may have hoped for a divine intervention that would bring Regina back again, he certainly did not demand this as proof of his faith, nor did he suffer some kind of crisis of faith because he did not receive divine intervention, as Grau suggests. The entire notion of a "reward" for being faithful seems totally foreign to Kierkegaard's understanding of faith.

I would add that Grau seems to misunderstand Nietzsche if he thinks Nietzsche would press anyone for a proof and rational verification of religious beliefs. As we learned in the last chapter, for Nietzsche the dangerous truth that Christianity discovers through its own value of truthfulness is not that it lacks a rational proof of God, but rather that its belief in God and transcendent, world-renouncing values are in fact based on world-embracing motivations (the will to power.) In other words, Christianity collapses because it cannot maintain its strict division between the transcendent and the worldly in which the worldly is to be despised on the basis of transcendent values. But Kierkegaard's Christianity claims to reconcile the transcendent and the worldly. As I will explain later in this chapter, there is indeed an interesting application of Nietzsche's notion of internal collapse to Kierkegaard's Christianity, but the grounds of this application have nothing to do with the "proof" or "rational verification" of Christianity.

Grau also greatly misunderstands Kierkegaard's life of faith, especially his notion of "the instant" in relation to faith. He takes it as a failure on Kierkegaard's behalf that, having criticized the aesthete for living only in the moment, he now returns to this idea in the mode of faith (Grau, 244, 247).[119] Discussing the either/or between 'the ethical' and aesthetic "'instants' of fleeting 'highs'" Grau says:

> Nevertheless, at the end of his journey of faith Kierkegaard will be forced to proclaim this very 'instant' Christian as well, and he will have to pay for this regression with the admission that the synthesis of finite and eternal, which had at one time appeared verified to him only in Christian faith, is indeed unattainable." (244)

The most obvious problem here is that Grau has failed to take into account the difference between the 'instant' in the life of faith and the 'instant' in the aesthetic life, which is the vast difference between 'first immediacy' and 'second immediacy'. The 'instant' of the aesthetic life is the fleeting moment in which the aesthete flees from himself and from any continuity in time. In contrast, as we learned in Chapter 1, the 'instant' of the life of faith means being present to oneself and unified within oneself in one's concrete, everyday situation; it means being at peace with the passage of time and with oneself. As a result of this misunderstanding, Grau sees it as a "regression" for Kierkegaard to return to the notion of an instant.

Grau's misunderstanding of Kierkegaard as trying but failing to rationally prove God's existence can be set in contrast to what was once the standard point of comparison between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Existentialists in the 20th Century like Jaspers and Camus looked to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as early "irrationalists" who challenged and overthrew traditional philosophical attitudes about the efficacy of systematic reasoning (Jaspers, 25, Camus,22). Although this reading is valid insofar as it goes, a focus on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as

[119] See also Grau's discussion of this point in *Venunft, Wahrheit, Glaube: Neue Studien zu Nietzsche und Kierkegaard*, (Würtzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997), p. 93.

"defenders of the rights of the irrational" has the tendency to overlook their carefully reasoned dialectical explanations of how ways of life collapse internally (or succeed in escaping such internal collapse). Thus, although Camus shows great deference for Kierkegaard ("Of all perhaps the most engaging, Kierkegaard, for a part of his existence at least, does more than discover the absurd, he lives it"), Camus nonetheless critiques Kierkegaard for abandoning and escaping the absurd by sacrificing the intellect altogether. He reads Kierkegaard as substituting God for the absurd and then abandoning lucidity in the face of the absurd altogether.

Camus locates his own position on the absurd as counter to this, stating that "if I recognize the limits of reason, I do not therefore negate it, recognizing its relative powers. I merely want to remain in the middle path where the intelligence can remain clear" (Camus, 40). Yet it is unclear how Kierkegaard might be cutting short the exercise of the intelligence in its "relative powers." For Kierkegaard, the only things that the intellect fails to grasp are the paradoxes of Christianity and the view of human selfhood this Christianity represents. The intellect exercises considerable "relative powers" with respect to everything else, and is even helpful in leading us to these paradoxes when we try to apply the intellect to understand faith. Moreover, consider how closely what Camus calls "lucidity" in the face of the absurd matches with Abraham's state of mind in *Fear and Trembling*. Although he lacks a rational account to justify or explain himself, Abraham seems to have a lucid understanding of his situation vis-à-vis God and how he ought to fulfill the demands of his faith.

Having discussed problems within the Kierkegaard scholarship of studies comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, we are now ready to turn to problems within the Nietzsche scholarship of these same works. Several sources of error which tend to plague Nietzsche studies more generally are in evidence here. For example, we find the problematic dependency on Nietzsche's unpublished *Nachlass,* compiled under the title *The Will to Power*. Malantschuk draws heavily from this work in elucidating his view of Nietzsche, calling it "one of his major

works" (Malantschuk, 117). To a lesser extent, Hinman also relies upon these notes to support his reading of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence (Hinman, 100,107,111,115). Other studies tend to rely heavily on the author's own interpretations of passages from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* without conferring with Nietzsche's other works to see if these interpretations fit with Nietzsche's explicitly stated ideas. As we have already seen, John Powell Clayton's comparison of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche depends entirely on his interpretation of the 'three metamorphoses' passage. Failure to consider other texts or even other passages within Zarathustra leads Clayton to mistaken notions of Nietzsche's ideal, which will be discussed shortly. Likewise, Kellenberger's analysis of Nietzsche's joyful life-affirmation depends upon his interpretation of a single passage in Zarathustra. The fact that Zarathustra participates in the 'second dance song' is taken as sufficient evidence for the view that for Nietzsche joyful self-affirmation is a result of one's will.[120] Specifically, his literary interpretation of this single passage allows Kellenberger to conclude that the joy of Nietzsche's ideal life is a willed entrance into Dionysian frenzy in order to (self-deceptively) escape the horrible truths one knows about the world (Kellenberger, 110).

Related to this, and by far the most common weakness of the Nietzsche scholarship in these studies, is an undue reliance on interpretations of Zarathustra's figure of the *Übermensch* to articulate Nietzsche's ideal for how to live (Malantschuk, Hannay, Kellenberger, Clayton, Cinelli, Bonifazi, Jaspers, Deleuze). As discussed in Chapter 2, the few mentions of the *Übermensch* in *Zarathustra* are insufficient to ground any clear picture of Nietzsche's ideal. In the absence of any substantial grounding, scholars tend to project onto the *Übermensch* whatever they want (or fear) Nietzsche to mean by this figure.

[120] In Part Two of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra encounters girls dancing in the woods and he sings for them a song about Life and Wisdom (personified as women), but does not participate in the dancing (Z:2 "The Dance Song"). In Part Three of the book, the section entitled "The Second Dance Song," begins with Zarathustra being compelled to dance by the personification of life: "Twice only did you raise your castanets in your little hands – then my feet were already tossing in a mad dance" (Z:3 "The Second Dancing Song").

Gregor Malantschuk finds the *Übermensch* to represent Nietzsche's ideal of a dictator who rules by might: "For 'the many-all too many,' as Nietzsche says, the superman must create laws, he must govern them with might" (Malantschuk, 121). Although Malantschuk is opposing Nietzsche and Clayton is defending him, they both read the *Übermensch* as someone who is free from any 'thou shalt' and "is not bound by lasting commitments" (Malantschuk, 120;Clayton, 191). If these authors had taken a broader look at Nietzsche's works, or even at other passages in *Zarathustra* (as we did in Chapter 2), they might have realized that for Nietzsche to be free of any commitments is *not* an ideal. Clayton mentions Nietzsche's ideal of someone who is "his own lawgiver and judge" but apparently does not understand this lawgiving as generating any lasting commitments (Clayton, 191). As we saw in Chapter 2, Nietzsche's ideal is the ability to form and keep one's own autonomous commitments.

Other readings of the *Übermensch* vary widely. Kellenberger talks about this figure as a substitute for God, while Cinelli finds him to be the "final result of the evolutionary process of man" (Kellenberger, 78; Cinelli, 138). More problematically, Hannay finds the *Übermensch* to represent the purely naturalistic values of what he calls 'the scientific project' (Hannay, 212). Hannay complains that this naturalism "sides with science, mechanizes man, and then pitifully leaves us with a still impotent 'Overman' who has freed himself from the resentments of first philosophy only to settle for the unexamined values propelling the scientific project" (Hannay, 212). Hannay leaves it unclear what these scientific values might be, why they are unexamined, why they are associated with the 'Overman', and why the 'Overman' is impotent to do anything but adopt them. Oddly, Hannay associates Nietzsche not only with science but also with irrationalism, arguing that "for Nietzscheans the question is where now to look for the universal in reason's so called other" (Hannay, 211). What is problematic here is not so much the familiar labeling of Nietzsche as an irrationalist, but the suggestion that Nietzsche wants to create universal values. He explains that even after "dispensing with the universal in its Socratic form"

we still have "the ability to create our own exemplars" (Hannay, 211). Yet it is unclear why these exemplars should be *universal* exemplars, given Nietzsche's attacks on universals and his insistence that values need not be taken as universal in order to be respected.

Parallel to these loose readings of the *Übermensch*, several studies are based on questionable readings of Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche scholars often debate whether Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence should be thought of as an ontological or "cosmological" thesis (that the world actually repeats itself), as Nietzsche seems to suggest in some of his later, unpublished notes, or whether it should be taken simply as an existential question (testing whether we affirm the world as it actually is). Hinman does an excellent job of distinguishing these readings (Hinman, 97). But then he seems to blur them together in arguing that the cosmological reading can be maintained, but not "as a realists thesis about the world as such" (Hinman, 101). Instead, Hinman uses a notion of the will to power as interpretation found in the *Nachlass* to argue that for Nietzsche the question is whether "we can – in thought as well as in action – *impose* the cosmic doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same on existence" (Hinman, 101). By acting and thinking *as if* the world repeats itself, by interpreting the world as doing this, Hinman thinks we can "attempt to make the cosmic doctrine true by embodying it" (Hinman, 101). Hinman seems to suggest that we can somehow bring about eternal recurrence as a cosmological fact simply by interpreting our lives as eternally recurring. Although I find Hinman's solution intriguing, he leaves it unclear how we are to act and think as if the world repeats itself. Moreover, it is not clear that Nietzsche would be comfortable with the notion that eternal recurrence as a cosmological thesis is somehow dependent on how we act and think.

Other authors are less careful in discussing the notion of eternal recurrence. Malantschuk suggests that Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrance is a desperate and failed attempt to regain something eternal in the absence of God. He believes that for Nietzsche, we find ourselves faced with the fact we

are "between two voids" – our non-existence in the infinite past before we existed and our non-existence in an infinite future after we die. "A sinister nothingness and annihilation await the individual who does not believe in eternity, as this alone can withstand the river of time. In a desperate attempt to escape this, Nietzsche clutches at the doctrine of eternal repetition or recurrence" (Malantshcuk, 121-2).

The first point to make clear is that Nietzsche does not seem to be worried about the 'nothingness' after death, let alone the nothingness that preceded birth. Malantschuk states that "I agree with the interpreters of Nietzsche who maintain that this belief in eternal recurrence is adopted by him as a surrogate for the immortality of the soul. In order to save his individual existence from perdition and extinction in nothingness, he is forced to have recourse to a belief in eternal recurrence" (Malantschuk, 122). Yet how could the nothingness after death be a "perdition" for Nietzsche? To foist on Nietzsche the need to have some kind immortality is to overlook one of his central ideas, namely that we should affirm life as it is, as something *impermanent*, and that all values which uphold permanence as a condition of value are life-denying. Malantschuk is simply being unfair in suggesting that Nietzsche is desperately trying to find some substitute for the doctrine of immortality, since this doctrine is one of the life-denying beliefs Nietzsche wants to overthrow. If Malantschuk's point is simply that we all have a psychological desire to feel that we are immortal, it is not clear how this can be made into an objection against Nietzsche since Nietzsche could either claim that eternal recurrence fulfills this need (or that this need is one of the 'unnatural' and life-denying instincts of asceticism that needs to be overcome).

Deleuze runs into similar problems because of his own loose reading of eternal recurrence. He attributes this doctrine to Nietzsche as an ontological claim, claiming that Nietzsche "conceives of repetition in the eternal return as Being" (Deleuze, 6). Deleuze then goes on to claim that "Nietzsche's leading idea is to ground the repetition in eternal return on both the death of God and

the dissolution of the self. However, it is a quite different alliance in the theatre of faith: Kierkegaard dreams of an alliance between a God and a self rediscovered" (Deleuze, 11). It is unclear how eternal recurrence is grounded in the death of God, although it may be motivated by a desire to find some 'eternal' meaning in a life without a notion of an eternal God and eternal soul. More importantly, it is unclear in what way Nietzsche believes in the "dissolution of the self", except as either nihilism in the negative sense (dissolution through weakening, self-hatred, and decadence) or as the overthrow of the (Kantian) notion of a subject.[121] But for Nietzsche there is clearly a strong belief in at least the possibility of an individual self, if only as a rarity and an ideal. For both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard there is a "rediscovered self" on the other side of the spiritual crisis they warn us about, however much this "self" differs from the conceptions of selfhood prevalent in traditional Western philosophy.

Two other studies also make the mistaken suggestion that in contrast to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche does away with all individual selfhood. Malantschuk warns that:

> One consequence of Nietzsche's outlook is that the individual disappears entirely as an independent being and becomes a mere cog in the huge machinery of the world with its eternal repetitions. The German philosopher therefore retreats into the last refuge of paganism, a belief in an inexorable fate, in which man is entirely at the mercy of blind forces. (Malantschuk, 123)

Whatever Nietzsche's view of freedom and determinism, this view would never amount to a rejection of individuality, at least as an ideal. At the very least, this is true for the simple reason that for Nietzsche ontological theses about such topics as free will always follow *from* one's values, rather than serve as the rational ground of these values. While Nietzsche does talk about 'fate' (each

[121] Deleuze seems to be suggesting the post-modern reading of Nietzsche in which Nietzsche is denying individuality and selfhood. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, although Nietzsche is indeed dismissing the usual (Kantian) notion of a 'free subject', he is by no means dismissing individuality. As we saw in a review of what Nietzsche says about his ideal 'higher type' in a range of works, Nietzsche holds individuality as essential to this 'higher type.'

person is at bottom a substratum of spiritual fate) this fate does not take the form of vast impersonal, blind 'forces' – one's fate is one's character, one's instincts, one's individuality. In other words, Nietzsche's notion of fate never amounts to the individual becoming a mere 'cog' in a vast cosmic machine. To the contrary, Nietzsche pairs strong individuality and a "trusting fatalism" in which the whole is affirmed (*TI* "Expeditions" 49).

Like Malantschuk, Hannay suggests that Kierkegaard's notion of "the particular individual" is nowhere to be found in Nietzsche. Unlike Malantschuk, Hannay offers some defense this reading. He says that for Kierkegaard "what one essentially is, if anything, lies beyond and above, and is therefore no longer protected by, any finite role or character description" (Hannay, 215). Whether or not we accept Hannay's desciption of the Kierkegaardian self as essentially beyond any finite role or character description, Hannay's unstated and highly questionable premise here is that Nietzsche's notion of an individual *is* something completely encompassed by finite roles and character descriptions. Given Nietzsche's emphasis on a 'free spirit's' ability to liberate himself from societally-imposed ideas and norms, I think Hannay would have a difficult time defending this characterization. Certainly there may be a sense in which what Kierkegaard calls "spirit" may be missing from Nietzsche's account; Nietzsche's notion of selfhood is undoubtedly more naturalistic or animalistic than Kierkegaard's. But Hannay seems to suggest that for Nietzsche there is nothing spiritual about the self at all, a point Nietzsche would contest. (Nietzsche is clear that his 'higher type' is supposed to represent "a more spiritual nature" (*GM* I:17).) What this difference between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche amounts to is a different conception of what a human self is and what it takes to be an individual, although they converge in holding this individuality to be not only possible but ideal.

Having discussed this and other particular problems within Hannay's study of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, I will now to turn to Hannay's central thesis, in which I find a direct challenge to one of my central claims. Hannay

maintains that "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are in such fundamental disagreement on the matter that interests them most that it is closer to the truth to describe any apparent similarities and parallels ultimately as differences" (214). Although he acknowledges a point I take to be central to my study, namely that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche offer us two "alternative views of human fulfillment," he also maintains that there is no possibility of a fruitful "dialogue" between these thinkers (Hannay, 215). Hannay insists that "there is no denying, and no amount of strategically selective 'dialoguing' should obscure the fact, that these are thinkers with fundamentally very different ideas about what the new world needs. Not one *via positiva*. Possibly two in parallel. But not so that you can have a foot in each" (Hannay, 216). According to Hannay, what is fundamentally blocking any such "dialogue" is the fact that behind Nietzsche's ideals and Kierkegaard's ideals there are "different metaphysical structures." Hannay says that for Kierkegaard the project is "still recognizably moral, its *telos*, or 'excellence', the formation of genuinely social intention, while Nietzsche's is not that. The two notions have different metaphysical structures. That the metaphysical frameworks differ means that most seeming parallels are at bottom illusory" (Hannay, 216).

In response, I would say that for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche the central issue is still 'ethical' or 'moral', as Hannay seems to acknowledge in saying that "I feel sure Kierkegaard would have recognized in Nietzsche a genuinely moral thinker" (Hannay, 216). It remains unclear what Hannay means by saying the telos of Kierkegaard's struggle is "the formation of a genuinely social intention." I suspect it might be difficult to find such a social intention as the telos of Kierkegaard's work, or at least to show that Kierkegaard has more of a social intention than Nietzsche. The second point is that while Kierkegaard and Nietzsche may in fact be buying into different metaphysical frameworks, this should not in itself preclude a valuable dialogue between them. As I just discussed, neither put any emphasis on getting one's metaphysics straight as a kind of foundation for ethical thought. Moreover, many thinkers

who do not share a metaphysical framework have been able to engage in a productive dialogue (e.g. Kant and Hume, Plato and Aristotle).

It seems that what Hannay really objects to in dismissing any "dialogue" between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is what Kierkegaard would call "mediation." Certainly, no amount of mediation between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche will succeed in conflating their very different ideals together, nor would this be desirable. As I have maintained throughout, what makes the possibility for a dialogue between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche so valuable is that they maintain such strong disagreements while still pursuing the same questions. What I mean by a "dialogue" between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is not mediation between them such that we converge on a single answer to the question of what way of life is best. Rather, I see this dialogue as spelling out the points of disagreement between two thinkers mutually pursuing this ethical question and project.

§2: KIERKEGAARD vs. NIETZSCHE ON THE BEST WAY OF LIFE

Having reviewed some of the most recent and influential studies of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, I now take up the task of drawing my own points of contrast between these thinkers. Bearing in mind these other studies of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, I should begin a note on my methodology. Of the scholarly comparisons of these figures that I have read, several have made this a comparison of these men *personally*, or worse yet, a comparison of one man's actual life with the other's ideal life. In what follows I will stick to a comparison of the *ideals* of these two thinkers, however much an *ad hominem* approach is tempting and even ironically fitting, given their own frequent uses of this approach.

The most obvious point of disagreement between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is, of course, religion. Kierkegaard believes that there really is a God and Nietzsche believes that there really is not a God. Since the reality or unreality of God is so central to the work of each of these thinkers, one might

think that any supposed 'dialogue' between them would immediately reach a stalemate (as Hannay would predict). This might be true if Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were typical philosophers, if they took this metaphysical thesis about the existence of God as conceptually foundational, as a 'first premise' from which all their other ideas are based. But this is the case for neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche. Neither put any stock in arguments made either *for* a metaphysical thesis about God's existence, or *on the basis* of such a metaphysical thesis.

A similar point can be made with respect to the proclamation that 'God is dead,' which seems like an obvious point of disagreement between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. This supposed point of disagreement is not so obvious if we consider what Nietzsche means by 'God' in this sentence. What I take Nietzsche to mean by declaring 'God is dead' is that the concept of God is 'dead' in that we can no longer rely on this concept as the conceptual foundation for our thinking on ethics, natural science, etc. (It would be bizarre to read Nietzsche as saying that there had been a divine entity but that this entity had died. Likewise, if Nietzsche intended to propose the metaphysical thesis there never was any divine entity, it is not clear why he would associate this idea with a current crisis in values.) All the dramatic weight of the idea that 'God is dead' seems to come from the lost usefulness of the concept of God as a foundation for our thinking about ethics, etc. This seems to be what he has in mind in declaring that if God is dead, one loses the right to Christian morality. But understood in this way, I think Kierkegaard may well agree with Nietzsche that this 'God' is indeed dead, and has never existed. Kierkegaard is just as eager as Nietzsche to attack the idea that God should be relied upon as a conceptual foundation in this way. As we have seen, Kierkegaard is opposed to any rationalist conception of religion in which a metaphysical thesis about God's existence neatly grounds a system of ethics; for Kierkegaard, God is precisely what confounds and destabilizes our ordinary understanding of ethics.

So while the issue of God's existence is certainly an irreconcilable difference between them, and may well be the final point of disagreement at

which discussions of various topics eventually come to a dead-end, I don't think it precludes a meaningful dialogue between them. Instead of meeting head-on over the question of whether or not God truly exists, I think each thinker would take a more subtle and artful approach. Each thinker would formulate a critique using his schema of internal collapse: Kierkegaard would try to locate Nietzsche's highest way of life as a form of despair and Nietzsche would try to locate Kierkegaard's highest way of life as a form of nihilism or *ressentiment*.

Let us begin with Kierkegaard's potential critiques of Nietzsche's ideal life of creative sovereignty. In doing so we will take as our guide the typologies of despair Anti-Climacus traces in *The Sickness Unto Death*. An obvious match with Nietzsche, as Malantschuk points out, is the final form of despair described at the very end of the book: the "height of despair" in which one commits the "sin of abandoning Christianity *modo ponendo* [positively], of declaring it to be untruth" (*SUD*:158). He thinks the positive denial of Christianity is a matter of offense: "abandoning Christianity as a falsehood and a lie is offensive warfare" and this "sin" is "the positive form of being offended" (*SUD*:159). It is certainly true that Nietzsche denies Christianity positively, even if this is not the meaning of 'God is dead' and even if Nietzsche does not try to establish this denial as the endpoint of a rational proof. It is also true that Nietzsche is 'offended' at Christianity in much the way Kierkegaard expects. But it is not clear how Kierkegaard's account of this form of despair could be leveraged to attack Nietzsche's position. Kierkegaard thinks trying to establish God's existence positively is by nature impossible; moreover, he regards all such philosophical defenses of Christianity to be offensive to Christianity. Since, for Kierkegaard, to want to positively establish *or* deny Christianity philosophically are both forms of 'offense', he would have no philosophical grounds for objecting to Nietzsche's rejection of the idea of God's existence. This issue of positive assertions or denials of the 'truth' of Christianity is something that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche generally want to avoid. Since this issue leads a comparison between them immediately back to the dead-end of the 'God question' (whether God

exists or not), it may not be as helpful for exploring their differences as it would seem.

More fruitful, perhaps, is the consideration of Nietzsche's ideal in relation to the very lowest levels of despair. In his firm denial that we are anything more than our natural, animal self, Nietzsche's ideal individual seems to be ripe for the charge of 'spiritless despair': "the despairing ignorance of having a self and an eternal self" (*SUD*:73). Since Nietzsche rejects the notion of an eternal soul, Anti-Climacus might declare that Nietzsche's highest type has "no conception of being spirit" and has gone no further than the conception of the self held by "paganism and the natural man." Whether Anti-Climacus would consider Nietzsche's highest type to be in the despair of 'pagan spiritlessness' (as Nietzsche might prefer) or 'Christian spiritlessness' (since Nietzsche's highest type, unlike the pagans, has at least been exposed to Christianity), I do not know.

In either case, I think Nietzsche could reply that what really lacks "lofty spirituality" is Kierkegaard's notion of spirit as requiring something above and beyond finite, "worldly" reality. Nietzsche repeatedly contends that his life-affirming individual represents a "higher spirituality" and "more spiritual nature" than the Christian.[122] He also claims that Christianity, specifically its moral condemnation of those who love their earthly life, "is the favorite form of revenge of the spiritually limited on those who are less so" (*BGE*:219). Thus, I think this charge of spiritless despair would open up an interesting discussion between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on what counts as 'spirit' and what way of life represents the highest form of spirituality. Within their disagreements on these topics, I think we can find an interesting dialogue on the relation between spirituality and ethics. (This avenue of dialogue will be continued in the next chapter.)

[122] See for example GM I:16, BGE:213,219,201. A full discussion of what 'spirit' and 'spirituality' mean for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche lies beyond the scope of this study, but we will return to this topic in the next chapter.

As we discussed above, scholars comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche often point out that Nietzsche puts a very high value on aesthetics, whereas for Kierkegaard the aesthetic life represents a lower form of despair. So we might try to locate Nietzsche in the same form of despair as we find Kierkegaard's aesthete. Anti-Climacus associates the spiritless despair just mentioned with "the aesthetic individual" who is "totally dominated by his sensuous and psycho-sensuous reactions; he lives in the categories of the sensate, the pleasant and the unpleasant" (*SUD*:76,73.) Alternately, we might also try to locate Nietzsche's ideal within the despair of not wanting to be oneself, the despair of the "immediate person" who understands himself only as "something included in the scope of the temporal and worldly" and whose "dialectic" is therefore: "the pleasant and the unpleasant" "good fortune, misfortune, fate" (*SUD*:81-2). (The difference between spiritless despair and this form of despair seems to be that in the latter, the immediate person runs up against some kind of *scandalon*, an earthly need or misfortune.) The problem with locating Nietzsche's best way of life within Kierkegaard's despair of the aesthetic life has already been discussed: Nietzsche's idea is contrasted with both the pleasure-seeking and spiritless conformity that Kierkegaard identifies with the despair of immediacy.

Next we might consider Nietzsche's sovereign individual as falling within the category of 'demonic despair.'[123] (There is a certain dramatic sexiness to declaring Nietzsche's ideal life 'demonic.') We have some indirect support for this reading: Anti-Climacus says that denying Christianity is "the height of despair" and "the highest intensification of sin;" he also says that despair is sin, and that demonic despair is "the most heightened form of despair" (*SUD*:158, 165, 104). So it would seem to follow that those who deny Christianity positively are in demonic despair, according to Kierkegaard's schema.

[123] Variants of this suggestion are found in Kellenberger, 124, and to lesser extent in Malantschuk, 125. As we discussed in Chapter 3, what Kierkegaard means by "demonic" shifts slightly throughout his works, but in general it refers to the conscious refusal or avoidance of what one knows to be good.

Yet Nietzsche's life-affirming sovereign individual does not fit Anti-Climacus' most extensive description of demonic despair found at the end of Part I of the book. Nietzsche's 'higher type' can hardly be described as a person who "prefers to rage against everything and be the one whom the whole world, all existence, has wronged" (*SUD*:103). Rather than describing Nietzsche's ideal life, this description matches almost exactly the life of *ressentiment* with which Nietzsche's sovereign life is contrasted.[124] The same problem arises if, as Kellenberger suggests, we try to locate Nietzsche's ideal in the domain of "passive defiant despair" in which one "takes offense at all existence" (Kellenberger, 123). Like the person of passive defiant despair, Nietzsche's highest type realizes that there are some parts of himself that he cannot change, but this does not lead him to "take offense at all existence" (cf. GS:290 and *SUD*:102).

Lastly, we should consider Nietzsche's best way of life in relation to what Anti-Climacus calls "active defiant despair." I believe it is here that Nietzsche's ideal finds its greatest challenge from Kierkegaard. This despair involves wanting to be oneself, specifically wanting to be the self one creates. As Anti-Climacus explains, the person of defiant despair wants to use his freedom "to rule over himself, or create himself, make this self the self he wants to be, determine what he will have and what he will not have in his concrete self" (*SUD*:99). This description matches well with Nietzsche's notions of self-mastery and the self-creation involved in 'giving oneself style' (GS:290). Anti-Climacus finds this attempt at self-creation to fail of its own internal contradictions since this self "is constantly relating to itself only experimentally, no matter what it undertakes, however great, however amazing and with whatever perseverance" (*SUD*:100). The problem is not only that this self relates to itself only experimentally, but that since it lacks any notion of authority superceding its fleeting and sometimes contradictory whims, it cannot undertake

[124] Here I think we can see the importance of evaluating Nietzsche's ideal way of life, rather than Nietzsche himself, since the case could be made that Nietzsche does not fully escape this form of *ressentiment*.

anything with the seriousness necessary to bring this undertaking to completion: "It recognizes no power over itself; therefore in the final instance it lacks seriousness and can only conjure forth the appearance of seriousness, even when it bestows upon its experiments its greatest possible attention" (*SUD*:100). It certainly seems to be part of Nietzsche's notion of sovereignty that the sovereign individual is "liberated" from any power over him or her.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, a similar challenge can be found in Kierkegaard's journals. Criticizing Kant's notion of an autonomous person who "bound himself under the law which he gave himself" Kierkegaard says: "In a deeper sense that means to say: lawlessness or experimentation. It is no harder than the thwacks which Sancho Panza applied to his own bottom" (*Journals*, Transl. Dru, no. 1041). The central weakness with the attempt to master or create oneself is that this becomes only an arbitrary, "fictional" building project in which the self is "forever building only castles in the air" since "the negative form of the self exerts the loosening as much as the binding power; it can, at any moment, start quite arbitrarily all over again and, however far an idea is pursued in practice, the entire action is contained within a hypothesis" (*SUD*:100-1). For this reason, Anti-Climacus is suspicious of precisely the kind of "sovereignty" that Nietzsche claims for his ideal figure. Anti-Climacus refers specifically to the notion of self-mastery in a way that matches well with Nietzsche's call for someone who is happily conscious of his own power and mastery over himself and over circumstances: "The self is its own master, absolutely (as one says) its own master; and exactly this is despair, but also what it regards as its pleasure and joy" (*SUD*:100). As I argued in Chapter 3, I believe that what Anti-Climacus presents here is a powerful critique of self-reliance and the possibility of sovereignty, and this critique applies both to one's ability to shape and create oneself and one's ability to remain committed to one's projects and promises. As such, it is a powerful challenge to the very basis of Nietzsche's hopes for his sovereign individual.

Turning now to Nietzsche, I will begin by saying a few words about how Nietzsche might respond to this challenge, and then I will describe how Nietzsche might critique Kierkegaard's life of faith. Nietzsche might begin by saying that sovereignty is not about 'spanking yourself.' As we saw in Chapter 2, sovereign self-mastery is not the same as ascetic self-control. Unlike the ascetic, Nietzsche's self-affirming individual is not divided within himself, he does not turn against his own natural drives. I think Nietzsche could use Aristotle's schema to say that the sovereign individual is more like the 'moderate' man whose drives are already in line with what he knows to be good than the 'self-controlled' man whose drives would lead him astray from what he knows to be good unless he controls and suppresses them.

Nietzsche might also reply that if there is a 'loosening power' in the sovereign individual's life, it is not the same as the 'binding power.' The binding power is one's 'dominating instinct,' one's greatest passion in life; whatever drives or wishes might run contrary to this as a 'loosening power' are not as strong as the dominating drive. As we discussed in Chapter 2, Nietzsche's highest type has a dominating instinct or sovereign conscience that sets the other drives to order, at least to the extent necessary to maintain a unified self directed at fulfilling one's commitments. Nietzsche seems to allow that some people may have more than one dominating drive, as in his suggestion that the soul is an oligarchy of different drives. But if this oligarchy does not hold the whole self in unity or harmony, if the self splinters into an anarchy of competing drives, this would be a case of what Nietzsche calls *decadence,* "the anarchy of the instincts" (*TI* "Socrates" 4,9,11). It is also *decadence* if one's supposedly 'dominating instinct' changes frequently and arbitrarily, thereby prohibiting what Nietzsche calls an all-important "protracted *obedience* in *one* direction" (*BGE*:188).

As for the charge of arbitrariness, from an external perspective there may be something arbitrary about what a person's greatest passion in life happens to be. Likewise, and along with this, it may seem arbitrary what commitments a person happens to take upon herself. But in the life Nietzsche advocates, once

one comes to have this passion and enter into these commitments, they cannot just as easily or arbitrarily be done away with. The self-reverence with which he makes a promise insures that the promise will not be broken arbitrarily or on a whim, even for the sake of something else that this figure desires or values. The sovereign individual does not fulfill his commitments out of pursuit of "narrow utility," which would allow for such wavering as the needs of narrow utility change. Rather, he fulfills his commitments because he values and respects himself enough to keep his word. Whatever these competing desires and values may be, they do not override his value and respect for himself as someone capable of upholding commitments. Thus, the sovereign individual does not arbitrarily break commitments or enter into conflicting commitments - as Nietzsche says, the sovereign individual makes promises only very warily (*GM* II:2).

Moreover, regarding the 'creation of the self', as Nietzsche makes clear in the 'giving oneself style' passage of *Gay Science*, this is not a matter of sudden, arbitrary attempts to restructure or revamp the self as a whole. Nor is everything about one's self able to be changed. There are some things that simply must be accepted (e.g. for Nietzsche, his debilitating sickness), although one can perhaps make something valuable out of these hardships. Moreover, what can be changed is changed only "through long practice and daily work at it" (GS:290). For Nietzsche, this task of becoming oneself by becoming a sovereign individual is not something achieved in the moment of choice or decision, but a long and difficult process of growth and personal development. It is, in fact, the work of a lifetime.

Having outlined some of the defenses Nietzsche could supply against Kierkegaard's critiques of sovereignty, let us now to examine what critiques Nietzsche could levy against Kierkegaard's ideal life. This is not easy to discover since many of Nietzsche's usual critiques of Christianity fail to apply to Kierkegaard's life of faith. Primary among Nietzsche's criticisms is that Christianity is a matter of conformity and 'herd mentality'; Kierkegaard's fiercely

individualistic Christianity would not fall easily into this picture.[125] Kierkegaard's life of faith also seems to escape Nietzsche's critique of the Christian life as one of joyless self-loathing and resentment against the world. As we have seen, Kierkegaard's life of faith involves a joy in the everyday, and an affirmation of finitude as a gift and a task from God. Thus, it seems that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree in renouncing renunciation. Kierkegaard's best way of life is *contrasted* with the life of ascetic renunciation ('resignation' or 'Religiousness A') that Nietzsche locates at the heart of Christianity.

Yet I think Nietzsche would still find a deep *ressentiment* and nihilism within the life Kierkegaard is proposing. In Chapter 4 we saw that *ressentiment* for Nietzsche means the simmering resentment, discontent and hatred within those who are powerless against themselves, the world, and (most of all) those who are powerful, self-affirming and happy. By "nihilism" he means, among other things, a will to one's own self-annihilation, or an exhausted will to 'give up' entirely on life. There are three inter-related aspects of Kierkegaard's life of faith in which Nietzsche might find lingering *ressentiment* or nihilism: the insistence on conceiving of oneself as "nothing at all before God," the belief in one's own guilt (presupposed even in the belief in forgiveness), and the willingness to renounce the world as the first movement of faith (or even the renunciation implied by the *need* of divine benediction in order to affirm the world).

One of the most straightforward definitions of nihilism for Nietzsche is "the will to nothingness." This will to nothingness grows out of a resentful "aversion to life" and represents "a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life," a "hatred of the human, and even more of the animal" (*GM* II:24, III:28). Nietzsche explains this will to nothingness as the "*will* to self-belittlement" and self-torture in which a weak and resentful person vents his

[125] I suspect this is one of the reasons why Nietzsche was interested in writing a psychology of Kierkegaard. From what Nietzsche read about Kierkegaard in Martensen's *Christian Ethics*, Kierkegaard stood out as an exception to the overall picture of Christianity that Nietzsche was developing.

aggression against himself (*GM* II:28,25). Although Kierkegaard's life of faith involves accepting your life in the world as a gift and task from God, it also involves accepting yourself as 'capable of nothing' and the will to "make yourself nothing, become nothing before God" (WA, 10). If this is so, it is clear how Nietzsche's notion of nihilism in this sense still applies to Kierkegaard's life of faith.

In a similar vein, Nietzsche might also accuse Kierkegaard's person of faith of a certain self-hating dishonesty here: he does not want to face the fact of his own will to power, his own exercise of will, but even this renunciation of himself as 'nothing,' even this will to *be* nothing 'before God' represents a manifestation of one's will. In the same way, this apparent self-depreciation is a form of self-appreciation since, as Nietzsche puts it "He who despises himself still nonetheless respects himself as one who despises" (*BGE*: 78).

One of the most dangerous forms that the nihilistic will to self-belittlement can take is self-accusation, the belief in one's own guilt. For Nietzsche, such self-judgments are not really about regret for actual acts of wrongdoing. Rather, guilt is a psychological and sociological phenomenon in which those who are powerless preserve some sense of their power by venting their aggressive drives either against themselves, or against others in a form of "imaginary revenge" (by making others feel 'guilty' for being happy or strong). So for Nietzsche what came first, at the inception of society, was *ressentiment*, the miserable newly "tamed" man's drive to torture himself and to exact revenge upon those who are not as powerless or miserable. The concept of guilt (which in Nietzsche's explanation originally meant simply an awareness of a debt and contained no connotations of wrongdoing) was later seized upon by these powerful drives as a means to self-torture and revenge.

Nietzsche singles out the notion of guilt *before God*, a notion on which Kierkegaard puts so much emphasis, as representing a particularly vicious form of this self-hating *ressentiment*: "Guilt before God: this thought becomes an instrument of torture to him. He apprehends in 'God' the ultimate antithesis of

his own ineluctable animal instincts; he reinterprets these animal instincts themselves a form of guilt before God" (*GM* II:22). Although Kierkegaard's life of faith goes farther than Religiousness A in believing in the forgiveness of sins , the notion of one's 'total guilt' before God is not removed in the transition between Religiousness A and Christianity. In fact, it is *only* through the acknowledgment and repentance of one's total guilt that one can accept faith and forgiveness, since one cannot genuinely accept forgiveness where one does not find oneself guilty. So it seems that Nietzsche's critiques of 'guilt before God' as representing *ressentiment* and nihilism apply to Kierkegaard's life of faith.

Lastly, despite Kierkegaard's insistence that through faith one regains the world and the ability to participate fully and joyfully in it, for Nietzsche there is still a form of world-hatred in this stance. He could argue that the *ressentiment* here is evident in the fact that one is *willing* to renounce the world, and that one *needs* to get the world back again as a gift and task from God in order to accept it. Nietzsche believes that the hatred and revenge discussed above is eventually expanded and turned against "existence in general, which is now considered *worthless as such*" (*GM* II:21). I think Nietzsche could argue that in Kierkegaard's life of faith we are in fact finding the world worthless *as such*, which is why it needs to be redeemed by God. This need for divine redemption and this willingness to renounce the world signal the continued presence of world-hating *ressentiment*.

How might Kierkegaard respond to these critiques? He may have many responses, but I will consider just two. First, he could respond penitentially to these attacks on penitential Christianity by confessing that many people (including, perhaps, himself) living an apparently 'Christian' life actually act out of resentment, desire for revenge, etc. just as Nietzsche says they do. But he could maintain that this does not reflect in any way on the *ideal* of Christianity, which remains a life of genuine love. For Kierkegaard, Christianity requires not just the *appearance* of love, freedom from hatred, etc., but the *reality* of these things in the whole of one's life. So Kierkegaard could use Nietzsche's

accusations to further intensify our repentance and to prompt the confession he so often wants us to make: that what we call Christianity is the opposite of what Christianity really is. But Kierkegaard could make these concessions to Nietzsche while still maintaining the ideal of the life of faith presented above. For Kierkegaard, these awful realizations are not a prompt to overthrow the notion of guilt and embrace Nietzschean self-affirmation and faith in oneself, but rather just the opposite. For Kierkegaard, this type of self-affirmation and faith in oneself are precisely what need to be given up in order to be cleansed of whatever hatred, resentment, and desire for revenge we might have.

Another response Kierkegaard could make is a counter-attack against Nietzsche's notion of guilt. Simply put, Nietzsche seems to have no way of dealing with what we might call 'actual guilt.' "Guilt" may be a widespread sociological phenomenon, and it may arise from the historical and psychological conditions Nietzsche says it does. But as Nietzsche admits, the sociological and psychological phenomenon of guilt has little or nothing to do with actual guilt from particular acts of wrongdoing. Yet Kierkegaard would insist that in each individual's life there are particular acts which the individual recognizes as 'wrong' by his own standards (whatever these may be). Unless Nietzsche makes the implausible claim that his higher types would *never* do anything wrong according to their own beliefs and standards, the problem of guilt in a very straightforward sense arises. Nietzsche certainly cannot do away with all notions of 'wrongdoing' without making all ethical evaluative judgments of human life impossible; as Johannes says in *Fear and Trembling*, "[a]n ethics which ignores sin is an altogether futile discipline" (*FT*:124). Therefore, the past that needs redemption is not just the grand-scale historical past redeemed by the accomplishments of Nietzsche's 'creative spirit'. Even this 'creative spirit' has a past, a personal history in which there are particular acts of wrongdoing. So Kierkegaard's 'problem of guilt' at least *begins*. If it is not to be resolved through divine forgiveness of sin, how could Nietzsche attempt to resolve it through self-reliance alone?

What I hope this chapter has revealed are the lasting points of debate between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In keeping with the Socratic distance insisted upon by both of these thinkers, this study does not present an answer to the question of which thinker is right about the best way of life. Instead, I have found in their disagreements the grounds for a dialogue about some the most important issues within ethics, such the limits of self-reliant self-responsibility and autonomy, the proper relation to guilt, and the grounds for self-affirmation and affirmation of human existence generally. This is not to mention what is perhaps the most obviously (but also the most enigmatic) difference between them, regarding the relation between spirituality or religion and ethics.

CHAPTER 6

COMPARING KIERKEGAARD & NIETZSCHE

In the last chapter, we examined several points of disagreement between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and ended by summarizing some of the most significant points of divergence between them. These included the limits of self-reliance, the source of joy and life-affirmation, and the relationship between spirituality and ethics. As we shall see in this chapter, these points of disagreement not only abide but figure centrally even within the points of overlap and agreement between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Thus, the important differences between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche discovered in the last chapter cannot and should not be dismissed or theoretically 'mediated' out of existence (as Hannay fears). Just as in the last chapter I did not conclude by declaring one of these thinkers victorious over the other, here I will not conclude by declaring that they are somehow identical. To the contrary, it is necessary to bear these differences in mind in order to see how Kierkegaard and Nietzsche stand in a useful relation to each other.

There are many ways that the ideals of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche happen to coincide or agree, but I will focus on what I take to be three of the most significant points of agreement. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree that the best way of life is a life of individual responsibility, a life of joyful life-affirmation, and a life of deepest spirituality. In what follows I will review these points of agreement between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as well as the abiding differences inherent even within these similarities. This will establish that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche offer parallel, but by no means identical, visions of the best way of life.

§1: THE BEST LIFE AS A LIFE OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both hold that the best way of life is a distinctively *individual* life in several respects: a) in contrast to a life of conformity, b) in that the best life is a life of personal responsibility, and c) in that

only in the best life does one attain a unity and integrity of the self. One important sense in which the life of faith and the life of creative sovereignty are both individual is in their contrast to a life of conformity. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are both stridently opposed to social conformity and to a life in which one demands of oneself nothing more than to conform to the expected norms of one's society. As we saw in the first two chapters, both condemn any life in which one's values and self-understanding are simply based on the 'common understanding' of how life should be lived. Kierkegaard's hero of faith and Nietzsche's creative hero are both portrayed as standing beyond and sometimes even *opposed* to these norms.

Having said this, it should also be said that neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche is a solipsist or an isolationist. Both recognize the (Hegelian) point that one's self-identity is in some part determined by one's social atmosphere. Yet they both emphasize a strong contrast between the person who simply lets himself be dissolved into this 'social atmosphere' and the person for whom this social atmosphere is beneficial in allowing and supporting individuality. Even Judge Wilhelm, representing a position of self-reliant individualism more extreme than Kierkegaard finds in the life of faith, acknowledges that the individual must understand himself as "this specific product of a specific environment" and as a "product of this social milieu" (*EO* II: 251). Likewise, Nietzsche writes that his ideal individual is the "ripest fruit" of a long history of social developments and the product and achievement of his society (*GM* II:2).

It should also be said that neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche place emphasis on the uniqueness, peculiarity, or eccentricity of their ideal individuals. However much these thinkers were themselves eccentrics, they did not consider 'standing out from the crowd' as a valuable in itself. Rather, they expected that the excellence and strength of their ideal figures would itself distance them from the crowd (even if unnoticeably so, as Kierkegaard suggests in *Fear and*

Trembling).[126] This also gets to an underlying issue in their mutual opposition to conformity: both considered the inevitable result of such conformity to be mediocrity in contrast to personal excellence. In fact, both emphasize that the pressure to conform to societal norms is actually pressure to become mediocre. (This is the phenomenon they each call "leveling.") What is individualistic about the hero of faith or creative sovereignty is not just that they stand out as different from other people, or even that they stand as paragons of what is normally accepted as excellence, but that they stand as paragons of an excellence that may well go against the grain of commonly accepted norms. One of the things Kierkegaard and Nietzsche each seek to do is to illustrate this alternative notion of excellence through their respective portraits of the best way of life.

As we have seen by reviewing these portraits in chapters 1 and 2, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both believe that such individuality is rare. They each maintain that individuality is not a simply a given; a person is not born an individual nor is this individuality an inevitable result of maturing to adulthood. As Kierkegaard explains, individual selfhood does not come as a natural development like growing one's wisdom teeth, a beard, and that sort of thing. Individuality is attained only through difficult spiritual struggle and development, not as a natural part of 'growing up.' Nietzsche maintains that individuality is gained only through difficult spiritual struggle, both through history and within the individual. Although Nietzsche is a naturalist in the sense that he understands the human self as a natural organism, he does not think that individual selfhood is an inevitable part of natural development. In fact, Nietzsche worries that that the potential for individuality may well go unrealized in this "decaying" self-doubting present (*GM* II:24). The 'ripest fruit'

[126] Earlier in his writing career, Kierkegaard emphasized that 'hidden inwardness' was the distinctive mark of faith that, by its very nature, could not be an external mark of faith. And yet in his later writings he turned directly against this notion of 'hidden inwardness' and emphasized that the works of love and confrontation with 'the establishment' in Christendom would necessarily make the person of faith outwardly distinguishable from other people. Yet Kierkegaard's understanding of what faith is remained centrally focused on the inner life of the person in question. His definition in *The Sickness Unto Death* is that faith is having a self that relates to itself as something transparently grounded in God.

of human society may never appear; hence Nietzsche's exhortation for us to *will* this highest possibility for humanity. So for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, individuality is something one must strive to attain. To simply live as an individual in this highest sense is itself an accomplishment, whatever other qualities are also demanded in the lives of such an individual.

Yet there is a difference of degree between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on this point. Nietzsche sometimes seems to deny that most human beings are now or *ever could be* individuals, whereas Kierkegaard paints a more generous picture. Kierkegaard portrays a situation in which each person is, deep down, an individual self, even if this selfhood is corrupted and thwarted by a despairing will not to be oneself or to be a self one creates. In other words, while Kierkegaard holds the attainment of individual selfhood as an ideal synonymous with the attainment of faith, he also assumes an ontology in which each human being is fundamentally a singular, individual being who only fails to be an individual self in the highest sense through his or her own (individually) willed despair. Faith is not the creation of individuality but the acceptance of an individual selfhood that has been avoided and resisted in all other ways of life. In contrast, whatever ontology of personhood we may find in Nietzsche, he seems to be far less generous. In his repeated references to the 'herd', he sometimes seems to suppose that most people do not exist as individual beings at all, but are simply part of what might loosely be called the single organism of 'the herd'. Nietzsche also sometimes seems to suggest that some people are naturally endowed with the potential to become individuals in his highest sense, while others are not, such that not everyone is 'free' to become an individual in this sense (*GM* I:13).

This brings us to two issues that have lingered in the background of this and other comparisons of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but have never, to my knowledge, been squarely addressed. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche clearly have strong disagreements about the nature and extent of human freedom and about

the importance of human history for individual development.[127] Let us first examine their differences regarding freedom. To put the matter simply, Nietzsche often seems to be much more of a determinist than Kierkegaard. Nietzsche sometimes suggests that one cannot simply choose one's way of life, that what way of life one lives is a natural, unchosen outgrowth of one's physiological or psychological constitution.[128] This suggests that for many people, a transition between ways of life is not a real possibility. Moreover, among those for whom such a transition is possible, it is attained not through a momentary choice but only through a long struggle or "through daily work at it" (GS:290). In contrast to several of Nietzsche's suggestions, Kierkegaard would reject any notion that people would need to be 'destined' or naturally endowed with what it takes to live the best way of life.

Nonetheless, I think both would be skeptical of the extreme notions of freedom of later Existentialists such as Sartre. Nietzsche's biological conception of human agency leaves no room for the kind of freedom Sartre calls "transcendence" in contrast to "facticity." It is not clear how Sartre's notion of "transcendence" could be made to square with Nietzsche's insistence that our actions and thoughts are all the product of largely unconscious instincts or drives. For Kierkegaard, whose 'factors of the self' discussion is one of the patterns for Sartre's "transcendence/facticity" distinction, a person is never without freedom even though the limits of 'necessity' are also a factor in the self that should not be ignored. But for Kierkegaard there are other threats to freedom than the encroachment of external facts and causes.

For Kierkegaard, freedom is importantly limited by guilt. Insofar as we can get into, but not out of, a state of guilt by the exercise of freedom, the domain of freedom is limited with respect to what we would want from it. We would

[127] Like the topic of their respective ontologies of human selfhood, a complete discussion of the topic of how Kierkegaard and Nietzsche understand the nature and limits of human freedom lies beyond the bounds of this study. An entire dissertation could be written on each of these topics. Nonetheless, it would be negligent of me not to mention these two important differences between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.
[128] For example, this seems to be the point of his parable about sheep and birds of prey (*GM* I:13).

like to attain ethical excellence within this domain of freedom and the ethical life seems to promise that by our freedom we can avoid being guilty. But anyone old enough to take ethics seriously will find themselves guilty to at least some degree and therefore (in Kierkegaard's understanding) guilty *per se*. Since to take freedom seriously as part of an ethical life is to take one's own guilt or goodness seriously, guilt 'shipwrecks' the attempt to achieve goodness by means of one's freedom.[129] This means that freedom is problematically limited in its scope. In addition, for Kierkegaard freedom is limited in that the highest accomplishment available to human kind (i.e. faith) is only partly the accomplishment of human freedom – it also requires the grace of God. So while Nietzsche may be much more of a determinist than Kierkegaard, even Kierkegaard acknowledges certain limitations on human freedom that later Existentialists did not.

But it should also be said that neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche are primarily interested in articulating a philosophy of mind with respect to the ontology of the self or the nature of human freedom. Nietzsche would be suspicious that all such metaphysical speculations are secondary to the values one already holds. Kierkegaard would be suspicious of any systematic philosophical attempt to understand freedom insofar as he believes this freedom is to be found only within the individual self, and he believes philosophical systems are incapable of taking the individual self into account. Furthermore, neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche thinks questions about freedom need to be resolved first before addressing questions about the best way of life. (The person who sets out to solve the theoretical problem of free will *first*, and only thereafter grapple with ethical problems in actual life, is precisely the kind of speculative

[129] It think it could also be argued that Kierkegaard follows the Augustinian tradition in holding that sin corrupts one's freedom to choose. As Anti-Climacus says, every despair is in some small part demonic, meaning that it is in some way a situation of willing what one consciously knows to be bad or despairing. Despair is the situation in which one's will is entrapped in what one knows to be wrong (at least to some degree). For Kierkegaard, the despairing self does not just happen to sin, nor does it just momentarily will to sin, its will is in fact *wedded* to sin. In some cases at least, the despairing self is not just attracted to, but *addicted to,* doing what it knows to be wrong. Since it has entrapped itself, this limit on its freedom is not in any way exculpatory.

thinker both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche ridicule.) Of course, it might be interesting to explore their different notions of freedom, and some understanding of this difference may be necessary in order to understand the arguments and recommendations each makes with respect to the question of the best life. But it cannot be said that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ideals of how to live cannot be compared because they have different ontological notions of freedom or personhood (as Hannay seems to suggest). In fact, I suggest that it is precisely by comparing their ideals for how to live that their respective notions of freedom can be best understood.

Another issue that divides Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is the role that history plays in the development of individuality. Both portray the best life as a life in which one continually maintains and develops one's individuality as a self. But, as is often the case, Nietzsche is more interested than Kierkegaard in the *historical* development of this individuality. Nietzsche seems to suggest that while there have been noteworthy 'lucky hits' on the part of nature in the past, some of which produced strong, creative individuals of the kind he admires, there is also the project of actively willing and trying to produce such individuals, namely by making such an individual out of oneself. This is one way of stating what I take to be the goal of the 'revaluation of values' – to create an evaluative environment in which sovereign individuals can flourish and those who are not yet fully sovereign individuals may be aided in becoming so. Nietzsche often talks as if this development is only now becoming a historical possibility, the result of those long developments in values and in the human self that he traces genealogically.

In contrast, Kierkegaard does not engage in a historical genealogy of how individuality can become possible. Reacting against the Hegelians of his time, Kierkegaard often scoffed at intermixing historical speculation and knowledge with serious thinking about existing life. Like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard is keenly interested in diagnosing the state of 'modernity,' and Kierkegaard often reflects on the differences between modern life and life in

antiquity or the middle ages. But for Kierkegaard, an overemphasis on historical explanations is one of the problems of modernity to be overcome. Kierkegaard's main interest in history is how to overcome historical thinking in order to conceive of oneself as an actually existing individual capable of being 'contemporaneous' with Jesus as the 'prototype' for how to live.

This difference between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on the issue of history is certainly pervasive, but I think it is best understood as a difference in the means employed to bring about a shared philosophical task. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are primarily interested in the present and in a certain crisis of spirituality and values in 'the present age'; each strives to bring about the individuality of his readers *in the present time*. For Nietzsche this requires us to grapple with our social history, whereas for Kierkegaard it requires only that we grapple with our personal histories as individuals.

Returning now to the issue of conformity we find the task just articulated to be plagued by a Socratic worry, shared by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, that they will fail to stimulate individuality in their readers if their readers become mere followers and disciples. The aim of bringing about someone else's individuality contains a challenge, if not a paradox, in that any influence one may exert to push someone else toward individuality may itself interfere with this goal. This concern is the basis of Kierkegaard's use of 'indirect communication', and Nietzsche frequent exhortations against becoming a mere follower of his ideas.

Here we find one reason why each thinker keeps to a minimum his sketch of what the best way of life entails, and what the person living this like is like. As we have seen, what we get from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is something like a formal outline into which many different content-rich descriptions of actual people might fit. Neither thinker tries to establish what someone living the best way of life will believe with respect to most particular issues, and neither attempts to prescribe particular actions for particular situations. As we shall discuss in the next chapter, unlike action-centered ethicists, Kierkegaard and

Nietzsche do not try to provide a blueprint of how one should act. Both might agree with Aristotle that this sort of precision is more than we should ask of ethics.

For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the task of ethics is not to tell you how to act, or to provide a pre-digested answer for moral dilemmas. Instead, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are both engaged in the project of singling out and speaking to their readers as individuals. In fact, it may be said that for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche the primary goal is to *bring about* the individuality of their readers. They do so in part by addressing these readers as individuals in the tradition of Socrates. But Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are also Socratic in that both are concerned to preserve this fledgling individuality by eschewing any role as an authority. Thus, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche not only oppose conformity by requiring individuality as part of the best way of life, they are also careful that their own philosophical practices respect and preserve this individuality.

Another important way that Kierkegaard's life of faith and Nietzsche's life of creative sovereignty are both individualistic has to do with *responsibility*. Part of what it means for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to try to bring about the individuality of their readers is that they try to impress upon their readers the need to take responsibility for the way of life that they live and for addressing the internal collapse of this way of life, if need be. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche regard the best way of life to be a life of great individual responsibility. Both also regard the progression toward this life (from other ways of life) to be one of accepting greater and greater responsibility, not only for particular commitments in life but for the existential stance that comprises one's way of life. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it is often the case that people are unable or unwilling to entertain the notion of different ways of life, and they thereby consciously or unconsciously avoid responsibility for the way of life they live.

Of course this comparison regarding responsibility needs some qualification since, as we've seen, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche disagree as to the nature and limits of self-responsibility. For Kierkegaard, self-responsibility is the

cornerstone of the ethical way of life *in contrast to* the best way of life, the life of faith. We have seen how Kierkegaard's concept of the despair of the ethical life can be brought to bear as a powerful critique of the kind of sovereign self-responsibility Nietzsche praises. In Kierkegaard's ethical life, responsibility is understood as the self maintaining control over itself in the present, owning up to its past, and projecting itself into the future by way of promises and commitments. In the *Aufhebung* of the ethical way of life and the transition to the life of faith, self-responsibility is cancelled as the highest telos and the mode of relating to one's values, but it is also preserved in a transfigured way. Just as there is an 'ethics on the other side of faith,' namely a way of comporting oneself toward others and oneself that is entailed by faith, there would seem to be a 'responsibility on the other side of faith'. But what exactly is responsibility in a life of faith, and how does it differ from the responsibility in the ethical life?

The primary difference between what we might call ethical responsibility and religious responsibility is that in the former, self-reliance is understood as a central and required condition for responsibility. To take responsibility for a task in the ethical sense is to understand oneself as solely able and obligated to fulfill one's particular commitment to the task. However much this task may also depend on unforeseen circumstances or require the help of others, there is a point at which one must accept sole responsibility for one's own share of the effort. In this sense, success or failure in relation to a commitment to a task is necessarily considered as depending on nothing beyond one's self, even if the success or failure of the task itself also relies on other contingencies beyond one's control. Excellence in the life of ethical responsibility means successfully maintaining this commitment on the strength of one's own self-reliant resolve and willpower. In contrast, excellence for the person of faith means surrendering the claim to be able to maintain commitments on one's own strength of resolve. Put simply, the person of faith always assumes that she needs help, not just externally (as a supplement to her own self-reliant efforts) but inwardly as well. By relating to God as something *within* the self-referential relation that is the

human self, Kierkegaard's person of faith refuses to circumscribe any purely self-reliant area of resolve or willpower within herself.

From the ethical perspective to "surrender sovereignty over one's self," as faith requires, is to shirk one's responsibility, to give up the very grounds for being responsible. From the perspective of faith, the truly responsible thing to do is to admit that the ethical notion of self-reliant responsibility is untenable in actual life. (Kierkegaard's view here seems to be influenced by his Lutheranism, as Luther taught that the moral law is unfulfillable. If the law is unfulfillable, one's responsibility to fulfill the law is likewise unfulfillable.)[130] But I think that Kierkegaard's broader point is not that we cannot successfully fulfill *any* commitment on the strength of our own resolve; it seems plausible that we could do so, at least for more minor commitments. Rather, I think Kierkegaard thinks it is impossible to achieve moral excellence by relying on one's self-reliant efforts, since however much good one may do, this would not address the main threat to one's moral excellence: past guilt.

What then is meant by religious responsibility? We get some understanding of it from the definition of faith as a life in which one recognizes oneself as 'a gift and task from God.' To accept oneself as a task from God is to accept responsibility for oneself. This means accepting responsibility for the task of 'becoming oneself' as well as all the particular tasks this may involve (i.e. there is the general task of relating more and more truly toward oneself and God, and then there are the many particular tasks that Kierkegaard thinks a faithful life in the world calls us to fulfill). With respect to one's task in both the general and specific sense, taking responsibility for oneself does not entail accomplishing these tasks within and by means of an enclosed domain of self-reliant agency. One does not just receive oneself from God once-and-for-all and then proceed to take sole custody of this self; rather, one continually turns to God for help and guidance.

[130] Luther's influence is also evident in Kierkegaard's emphasis on trusting in God rather than in oneself.

One might say that the ethical person takes responsibility for accomplishing the task all by himself, whereas the religious person takes responsibility for asking for help and for becoming the vehicle through which God's strength accomplishes the task. This is what Johannes means when he marvels that what Abraham did "requires more-than-human powers" (*FT*:76). In relation to other people, Abraham "walks alone with his dreadful responsibility," but his strength comes not from himself alone, but from God (*FT*:107). Thus, while Kierkegaard and Nietzsche might agree about the need for individual responsibility in the best way of life, they have very different understandings of what this responsibility entails.

A final point about the individuality of Kierkegaard's life of faith and Nietzsche's life of creative sovereignty involves what we might call the unity or *integrity* of the self. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it is only in the best way of life that a person can attain a life in which one is not divided against oneself. For Kierkegaard, despair is always a matter of turning away from oneself and against oneself as one actually is. The aesthetic self tries to dissolve itself in pleasure only to find its actual self an inextricable burden, while the ethical self either tries to create itself in its own hopeful image or tries to renounce this self as hopelessly depraved and worthless. In contrast, faith is defined as a way of living in which one relates to oneself as the self one actually is, and accepts this self wholly and gratefully. Since the self *is* its relation to itself, and since faith is the only way of relating to oneself that is not a despairing misrelation, it follows for Kierkegaard that only in faith does a person become a self in the fullest sense.

In *The Sickness Unto Death*, one formula for faith is the life in which each of the 'factors' that comprise the self (possibility/necessity, infinitude/finitude) is acknowledged in its fullest and truest sense. The life of faith is the life in which each of these factors finds its place and there is a harmonious relation between them such that the self comes together into a whole for the first time. The more decisive formula for faith is a life in which "in relating to itself and in

wanting to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it" (*SUD*:79). As we have seen, for Anti-Climacus this means that in faith one accepts oneself in one's full actuality, since the self is actually grounded in the power that established it, i.e. God. It also means that God must be included in this loop of self-relation. For Kierkegaard, a human self only becomes whole and complete when it is not self-enclosed, but rather when it allows God within itself to such an extent that it relates to itself through God.

For Nietzsche, the human self can never accept itself in its actuality as long as a belief in God remains, since to posit an otherworldly perfection is to denigrate this world and oneself as an actual, worldly entity.[131] Thus, Nietzsche offers a different but parallel account of how one faces and accepts one's actuality as a person only in the best way of life. For Nietzsche, the self attains integrity within itself only when it ceases to turn against and away from itself, i.e., when it gives up *ressentiment* and ascetic values. Nietzsche's physiological or psychological portrait of internal collapse is one in which a person is either internally dominated by a self-destructive drive to attack one's self, or by a complete anarchy of the drives which disintegrates the self. In contrast, Nietzsche's best way of life represents a situation in which one not only achieves a harmony within oneself. One also achieves a self-strengthening cycle within oneself and in one's relations with the world. A dominating, self-affirming drive sets the other drives to order and organizes the self into a whole such that this unified self can accomplish great things. This integrity within the self is the work of the dominating instinct or guiding passion that we have called a "sovereign conscience."

For Nietzsche, an important part of the transition from a self-hating to a self-affirming relation to oneself is the acceptance of one's natural, bodily reality. It is a rejection of this side of our nature that he finds in all Platonic and Judeo-

[131] As we've already noted, for Kierkegaard faith is not a matter of having 'otherwordly' concerns. Abraham's faith, as the model for all faith, is 'faith for this world.' Yet it may be that for Nietzsche the fact that Kierkegaard acknowledges that there is a transcendent God, and that this God has such a central role in his conception of the best life, is sufficient grounds for objecting to 'otherworldliness' of this conception.

Christian (i.e. "ascetic") ways of thinking and valuing. While it is true that in Nietzsche's account the ancient nobles accepted and affirmed their naturalness and escaped the internal collapse of *ressentiment* and nihilism, Nietzsche does not believe that a return to the situation of the ancient nobles is possible. For Nietzsche, the only way to regain an acceptance of our actual selves is to reverse the ascetic bad conscience and forge the new, sovereign conscience described above. Although Nietzsche rejects the idea that the self is in any way dependent upon God, neither does he hold the self-enclosed self as an ideal. Nietzsche would join Kierkegaard in condemning what Kierkegaard calls *Indeslutthed* "self-enclosedness." The self-strengthening cycle that we have identified with the sovereign individual includes a relation to the world, specifically one's accomplishments in the world. Far from a self-enclosed solipsism or Stoicism, Nietzsche's ideal life includes a Dionysian openness and unity with the world. As I have suggested, Nietzsche description of Goethe's ideal describes his own: "A spirit thus *emancipated* stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism, in the *faith* that only what is separate and individual may be rejected, that in the totality everything is redeemed and affirmed – *he no longer denies*" (TI "Expeditions" 49)

§2: THE BEST LIFE AS A LIFE OF JOYFUL LIFE-AFFIRMATION

The issue of openness and unity with the world brings us to our second broad area of comparison between Kierkegaard's life of faith and Nietzsche's life of creative sovereignty. Both of these ways of life involve a fundamentally joyful stance of life-affirmation, including an affirmation of the natural world and of oneself. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both believe that the best life is one of deep and abiding joy, gratitude for existence, and a passionate love of life. Contrary to their reputations as gloomy or 'dark' thinkers, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche emphasize the ethical importance of joy, perhaps more than any other thinkers. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the best life is centrally

characterized by this fundamental stance of joyful affirmation since one's values, goals, virtues, and beliefs emerge out of this stance.

It has been suggested that what we find in Kierkegaard is an 'ethics of love', and I believe the same could be said for Nietzsche.[132] Of course, given how little either Kierkegaard or Nietzsche discuss active relations with other people, and given their own disastrous personal histories with respect to romantic love, what this "love" consists in needs further explanation. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche would be wary of a diffuse, purely abstract 'love of others' *in general*. The individual Kierkegaard and Nietzsche regard as ideal has an overflowing love of life that manifests itself in particular loving relations. In both Kierkegaard's life of faith and Nietzsche's life of creative sovereignty, this love of life manifests itself as a (sometimes "severe") "benevolence" and "goodwill" toward others. I believe we find a peculiar, subtle but nonetheless robust love of humanity in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's own severe rebukes of their contemporaries. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, one's stance toward others is founded in a love of life in all its diversity and particularity, a welcoming, open posture that is eager to greet one and all as a dignified equal.[133] For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, genuine love of other people can only grow out of a stance of love toward life as a whole and a love for ourselves as part of this whole. Having clarified the stance of joyful gratitude and life-affirmation urged by both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, I think we can understand at least one sense in which both of these thinkers can be said to propose an 'ethics of love.'

For Kierkegaard, the centrality of joy in his conception of the best way of life is demonstrated in his insistence that "every man who truly wants to relate himself to God and be intimate with him really only has one task – to rejoice always" (JP 2186 VIII, A 12 [1847]). As we have seen, it is Abraham's joy that

[132] Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's ethic of love : divine commands and moral obligations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[133] This does not mean that they assumed that everyone was *already* dignified and equal. Nietzsche was especially suspicious of the notion of political equality that made this assumption. By saying that he was "eager" to greet others as a dignified equal, I mean that he was eager for them to *become* a dignified sovereign individual such that they would be equal to other sovereign individuals.

singles him out as a 'knight of faith.' We also saw how important it was for Kierkegaard that, unlike other religious conceptions of joy, this is a joy in 'this life' and for 'this life.' Abraham's joyful regaining of Isaac represents how in faith one passionately accepts everyday life as something for which one is joyfully grateful and in which one passionately invests one's whole self. Thus the modern-day Abraham strolling through the streets of Copenhagen "takes pleasure, takes part, in everything"; he is at home in the world because faith brings him into an active, loving engagement with the world as the place in which the divine becomes manifest (*FT*:68). In fact, faith can be said to involve the continual incarnation of the divine in one's own life in the world; I think this is what it means that faith is the ability "to express the sublime in the pedestrian absolutely" (*FT*:70). Likewise, in Kierkegaard's later work the issue of joy resurfaces as central to his conception of "what it is to be a human being and what religiously is the requirement for being a human being" (WA, 4). For Kierkegaard, this joy of faith involves an overflowing sense of gratitude for one's life that emerges when this life – and actuality as a whole – is understood as a gift and a task from God. The joy of this life is also found in the stance of grateful acceptance of one's forgiveness that Kierkegaard finds so important, and so challenging, about the life of faith.

For different reasons, but with equal passion and devotion, Nietzsche's best way of life also involves a joyful affirmation of oneself and the world. For Nietzsche this is a joy for 'this life' not as something hallowed by the presence of God but as something hallowed by its value and sanctity even in the absence of any such divinity. In Nietzsche's best life, one accepts the natural world and the whole of one's own naturalness with joyful affirmation. Only by loving the world as it actually is, and by loving one's self as one actually is, can one throw off ascetic resentment and come to the stance of *amor fati* and saying 'yes' to eternal recurrence. The love within *amor fati* and the love for life expressed in saying 'yes' to eternal recurrence represents the underlying stance of life-affirmation that is at the crux of Nietzsche's own 'ethics of love.' Only against a

background of overflowing love for life can people really come to "love one another" where this is not just (at best) an empty phrase, or (at worst) a disguised way of hating and resenting one another.

The joy of Nietzsche ideal life also includes the joy of creation. Nietzsche's highest type finds joy within the act of creating, of accomplishing what is difficult or challenging, of attaining personal excellence, and of pursuing the 'joyful wisdom' of philosophy. More broadly, it is a general 'zest for life': the joy one takes in being alive, the joy of growing, of becoming stronger, etc. More broadly still, this joy is also the Dionysian joy in which one finds one's unity with the whole and affirms it all, despite (or rather *because of*) its tragedy and suffering.

It would be incorrect to assume, as Kellenberger does, that the source of joy for Nietzsche's highest type is "momentary frenzy" in which one attempts to *escape* from a reality one realizes is painful and tragic (Kellenberger, 108-9). This reading undercuts the whole exuberant generosity of Nietzsche's life-affirmation: one loves the whole of reality and one's place as *inescapably* within it. This much is required if we are to affirm human existence. Importantly, this is not to say that Nietzsche's joyful affirmation precludes any act of denying and condemning in making particular judgments. We can affirm life and yet condemn what is mediocre, for example. In describing his (and Goethe's) ideal of someone who "*no longer denies*" Nietzsche makes clear that "only what is separate and individual may be rejected" but "that in the totality everything is redeemed and affirmed" (TI "Expeditions" 49). Likewise, while this joyful stance toward existence involves an affirming stance toward oneself, this does not preclude ambition or self-criticism. As we have seen, one way this joy manifests itself is as a sovereign conscience in which one maintains a kind of self-strengthening relationship between oneself in the world. This conscience includes a vigilance over oneself and a commitment to continually work to develop one's "style" "through long practice and daily work at it" (GS:290). Faith in oneself and self-affirmation lead to ability to act resolutely, independently and with a unified self

in order to achieve excellence in the world, and a recognition of this excellence in actuality further reinforces this faith in oneself and self-affirmation. But the sovereign conscience also allows us to look upon our shortcomings as tasks to work on (either to remove them or make something out of them) rather than as excuses for attacking and condemning ourselves.

From what we have said so far, it is clear that the *source* of this overall stance of joy differs for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. For Kierkegaard the source of this joy is a faith in God and a sense of God's transfiguring presence in the everyday world. In contrast, for Nietzsche the source of joy is a faith in oneself and a Dionysian faith in the affirmability of the whole of existence, despite the absence of God. For Kierkegaard we are joyful because the divine manifests itself in actual life, whereas for Nietzsche we are joyful because actual life is sacred and spiritual just as it is, despite (or even because of) the absence of any divine presence. For Kierkegaard, this joy includes relief of being able to 'cast all our cares' onto God, to trust in God completely, and to trust in ourselves only insofar as we have given ourselves completely over to God. In contrast, for Nietzsche, this joy involves reclaiming for ourselves all the credit we have previously given to God for our own accomplishments. Nietzsche's joy involves the feeling of pride and self-satisfaction toward one's own achievements and excellence. This is the joy of the 'good conscience'; joy might be thought of as the affirmation of the self-affirming conscience. In contrast, although Kierkegaard also sees the need to go beyond the 'bad conscience' in the sense of obsessive self-recrimination, the joy of faith does not include this kind of self-satisfaction for one's achievements in the world.

Despite these differences regarding the source of this joy, I would argue that the fundamental stance of joy manifests itself in similar ways in the ways of life each of these thinkers takes to be best. In both, joy manifests itself in an overall stance of love of life, openness toward the world and its diversity, and a grateful acceptance of ourselves as the particular people we are. The joy of Kierkegaard's life of faith and the joy of Nietzsche's life of creative sovereignty

overlap in three other important ways as well: a) in contrast to (mere) pleasure or 'happiness', b) in contrast to ascetic renunciation, and c) as the appropriate stance to take toward the overcoming of guilt.

For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche this joy should not be confused with pleasure or 'happiness' as this is usually understood. In fact, for both, joy within the best life is most often a joy amidst great pain and tragedy. For Kierkegaard, the joy of the 'second immediacy' gained through faith is not the enjoyment of the 'first immediacy', the aesthetic life. Far from being a life devoted to seeking pleasure, Kierkegaard believes the life of faith brings with it an increase of suffering and persecution. As I have argued elsewhere, to confuse the joy of faith with aesthetic pleasure is also to misunderstand the *directionality* of this joy: pleasure is taken in and from the world, whereas joy is received inwardly and then manifested outwardly as a way of being and living in the world. There may be a sense in which the joy of faith includes taking joy in the simple things of everyday life. But such moments are not the *basis* of one's acceptance and affirmation of life in the world; life is not affirmable because of its many little 'simple joys.' Rather, such moments are the *result* of an overall stance of joy; they require that we first approach the world with a joyful openness to its wealth of diverse and unforeseen particularities.

Likewise, for Nietzsche saying 'yes' to eternal recurrence is not a matter of finding what recurs pleasant, painless, or comfortable. Although Nietzsche spends less time than Kierkegaard detailing the internal collapse of the life of pleasure, Nietzsche does recognize the dangerous 'letting oneself go' of the hedonistic life. He also expresses disdain for those who seek happiness in the sense of mere comfort and pleasantness. In Nietzsche's best life, one squarely faces the misery, pain and meaningless stupidity of much of human life. One nonetheless affirms life because one recognizes that what is important is not freedom from pain but the ability to persevere in the face of it and make something meaningful out of the totality of one's experiences. Nietzsche's Dionysian joy is a joy amidst suffering and pain that may even *welcome* pain and

suffering in general as inevitable components of human life and as a necessary condition for one's creativity, spirituality, or personal excellence. As Nietzsche points out, it is pain and strife, rather than comfort and the absence of pain, that is the "soil" in which human greatness tends to flourish. Just as 'great health' is the not absence of sickness but the ability to make something of this sickness, joy in life is not the absence of pain and suffering but the ability to affirm life not despite, or because of, this pain and suffering.

Given this description of joy amidst (and partly because of) suffering, it is also important to point out how this joyful stance toward life contrasts with ascetic renunciation of life, since the ascetic may also experience a kind of blissful joy amidst suffering. As we have already noted, one of the most sustained areas of agreement between the thinking of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is to be found in their mutual condemnation of the ascetic, world- and self-renouncing life.[134] I think the issue of joy brings out the central contrast between this life and the lives Kierkegaard and Nietzsche take to be best. For Kierkegaard, it is the joyful acceptance of life in the world that differentiates faith from the despair of resignation and religiousness A. Writing from the standpoint of resignation, Johannes de Silentio claims his life contains its share of happiness: there is a peace of mind to be found in the safety and security of the ascetic withdrawal from the world. Yet Johannes is also clear that this kind of happiness is quite different from (and inferior to) the happiness of faith (*FT*:63).

This happiness-within-resignation, unlike the joy of faith, cannot be something that is manifested in one's interactions within the world, since it is achieved only by isolating oneself from the rest of the world. The ascetic can feel joy amidst pain and suffering only by denying or denigrating the whole realm in which this pain and suffering exists. In contrast, the joy of faith is something manifested only within an active, engaged life in the world. Unlike

[134] This reading may be more surprising in the case of Kierkegaard than for Nietzsche, and it may be that Kierkegaard's best life would still be fundamentally ascetic from the point of view of Nietzsche's ideas. But I think my textual analysis has demonstrated that the struggle against ascetic renunciation of oneself and 'this life' is central to the ideal life presented by both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

the ascetic's happiness, the joy of faith is not some purely internal phenomenon that one feels in isolation, but is rather something one expresses outwardly, in community with others.[135] In fact, this joy is the fundamental, underlying commitment to engaging in the world with love and openness. The joy of faith requires that we accept pain and suffering for what it is (even if this also means fighting it in concrete ways). The person of faith would find joy in the struggle against pain and suffering, or their debilitating effects, rather than finding peace of mind in surrendering this struggle or considering oneself 'above' it. In comparison with the hedonist, the ascetic's life may be one of strictness, self-severity, and brave renunciation of the pleasures and comforts of worldly life. But as Kierkegaard learned in his own life (and it was one of the hardest lessons he learned), compared with faith's courageous openness toward life, the stance of resignation is one of self-indulgent comfort, cowardice, and despair.

Nietzsche's notion of joyful life-affirmation is also presented in contrast to the stance of ascetic renunciation. In fact, the stance of joyful affirmation is Nietzsche's positive alternative to the fundamental stance of *ressentiment* that structures the ascetic and slavish way of life. In many ways, what Nietzsche recommends can be considered as some form of inverted Stoicism. For Nietzsche, joy is not achieved by accomplishing the strict divide between self and world recommended by Stoicism, but precisely by abolishing this distinction. Unlike the Stoic, who seeks to preserve himself with a conscience that separates his inner self from the external world, Nietzsche's ideal figure has a conscience that involves an engaged relationship with the world. In this relationship with the world, a person can be strengthened by misfortunes and failures as much, if not more than, by good fortune and successes.

[135] Kierkegaard is clear that one's fundamental Christian duty is to "be joy itself" and to be "nothing but joy" to others. Of course, what this amounts to is not trying to 'cheer up' other people. In Kierkegaard's case, this joy was expressed in harsh rebukes aimed at getting people to abandon their shallow mediocrity in favor of a more spiritual life. According to Joakim Garff, Kierkegaard was seldom more joyful than when he was launching his most venomous polemics against the Danish church.

It may seem puzzling that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, both famous for their astute and prophetic understanding of modernity, should be so concerned with the stance of ascetic world-renunciation, since this is a stance we would normally associate with the Middle Ages. In general, I believe both use the comparison of the modern age with the Middle Ages partly for its shock value: although the modern sensibility is flattered by a comparison with Greek antiquity, nothing offends it more than being compared with the 'dark ages'. But the ascetic life each worries about is not the life of the medieval ascetic monk or anchoress; it is not a life in which one outwardly removes oneself from the world. In Kierkegaard's case, the life of resignation means becoming inwardly withdrawn and remaining aloof from any attachments or interests in the world, while remaining outwardly active in one's everyday life. In Nietzsche's case, the ascetic life means living by life-denying, self-hating values, which is something he finds endemic to the modern age (perhaps even more so than in the Middle Ages).

Each in his own way, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche address the ascetic life as the *central* contrast to the best way of life, if not also the central *obstacle* to living that life. For Nietzsche most people are infected with ascetic values and live a slavish, mediocre way of life. Nietzsche finds ascetic self-denial, or its result the self-withering of the "last men," not only in the ethical values of his European society, but in its art and science as well. Moreover, what is ascetic in the ethical values he critiques is not just their content, although Nietzsche does think that the values being supported by Kant or Mill are in content that of Christian-Platonic morality. Their form is also ascetic. Nietzsche finds the depersonalization and universalism of these forms of philosophy and ethics to represent the same ascetic self-denial and world-renunciation as he finds prevalent throughout the history of Platonism and Christianity.

Whereas Nietzsche suggests that most people in the modern world live some variant of the ascetic life (especially its ultimate manifestation in the 'last men'), Kierkegaard suggests that most people live some form of the aesthetic life

(conformist, hedonist, etc.) and only a very few live the ascetic life (the life of resignation and 'religiousness A'). Nonetheless, as Kierkegaard learned in his own case, this life of resignation is particularly seductive to those who might otherwise choose faith. In Kierkegaard's schema, anyone who genuinely commits himself to the ethical life and pursues it with integrity will wind up in the life of resignation as that which follows the 'shipwreck' of this life on the issue of guilt. Thus the central struggle of *Fear and Trembling* is between the 'knight of resignation' and the 'knight of faith,' although there is a stern warning that not many can come as far as resignation, which is a prerequisite to faith. Like Johannes de Silentio, Kierkegaard all too often 'fled back to the pain of resignation,' and this inward struggle bears its mark on several of his most well-known texts. But Kierkegaard thought this kind of ascetic renunciation was quite rare. More numerous, but still comparatively rare, are the speculative philosophers and academics who indulge in a self-denying retreat into abstraction. But overall, Kierkegaard's recurrent interest in contrasting the ascetic life with the life of faith probably has to do more with his own personal situation than with an assessment of the kind of struggle most people face.

The last issue to address in relation to the stance of joy proposed by both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is how this stance is understood in relation to the issue of guilt. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, although in very different ways, this stance of joy represents the overcoming of guilt. For Kierkegaard, as we have seen, guilt is the central problem for anyone who has enough spirit and integrity to come as far as the ethical life. In the life of religiousness A, one dwells on one's guilt as definitive for one's relationship with oneself and with God. In the life of faith, by contrast, one repents but also opens one's heart to accepting forgiveness. Hence for Kierkegaard the most proper response to ethical guilt is to adopt a joyful stance of gratitude for one's forgiveness by God. Of course this joyful gratitude would include within it the pain of repentance, without which one may not feel the pressing need for forgiveness, but the joy of forgiveness encompasses this pain rather than vice-versa. Moreover, there is a

connection between this joy over one's forgiveness and the joyful participation in the world discussed above. As Kierkegaard understands it, the fact that God forgives (and "forgets") one's wrongdoing is precisely what allows for a joyous participation in the world, since without such forgiveness any self-affirmation or affirmation of life would seem to either ignore or discount the reality of one's guilt. So joyful gratitude toward forgiveness is necessary, and maybe even foundational, to the joyful gratitude one feels toward one's life and existence as a whole.

Nietzsche also envisions the stance of joy as the proper response to the issue of guilt, although as we have seen, for Nietzsche guilt should be treated as a psychological and sociological phenomenon. The stance of joyful life-affirmation represents the overcoming of the belief in guilt that is central to the ascetic approach to life. As Nietzsche explains it, the notion of guilt was first presented as a distinctively moral problem by the ascetic priests in an attempt to give life meaning. The belief in guilt serves two important functions. First, it answers the most pressing question: 'why do I suffer?' The ascetic explanation is that suffering is just punishment for wrongdoing. Secondly, spreading a belief in the (comparatively greater) guilt of the powerful is utilized as a means of taking 'imaginary revenge' on the powerful and of making the powerless seem more worthy by way of contrast.

As discussed in chapter 4, the ascetic notion of guilt can be overcome by turning 'guilt against guilt' just as we can overcome pity by turning 'pity against pity.' The notion of 'guilt against guilt' or 'feeling guilt for guilt' is part of Nietzsche's notion of a sovereign conscience: one has a conscience against the self-hating and vengeful tendency to find oneself and others 'guilty'. Nietzsche might say: if we are guilty of anything, it is imposing the torturously destructive notion of guilt on ourselves and others. So like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche considers the redemption from guilt one of the central features of the stance of joy found in the best life. But for Nietzsche this redemption comes not from taking our guilt seriously as an objective state of moral inadequacy before God,

but in seeing it as a pernicious but reversible psychological and sociological tendency. This is why the "creative spirit" who reverses the ascetic bad conscience (i.e. guilty conscience) is hailed by Nietzsche as a "redeeming man of great love and contempt" (*GM* II:24) It is out of a joyful love of life and love of one's self that Nietzsche's hero finds proper contempt for the belittling and self-destructive effects of ascetic conscience-poisoning.

§3: THE BEST LIFE AS A DEEPLY SPIRITUALITY LIFE

In mentioning "redemption" as a concern for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, we have already touched upon the third major area of comparison between their respective ideals. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the best life is also the most spiritual life. In this study I have compared Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as ethical thinkers, but one could also compare them as spiritual and religious thinkers. Indeed, a comparison of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on the more narrow topic of Christianity in modern life could fill several books.[136] On the other hand, given that neither thinker believes there is much we can say about 'spirituality' or spiritual matters beyond how they are manifested in human life, I suspect that an examination of how spirituality - or the lack thereof - manifests itself in how we live (i.e., ethically) may be the most we can solidly discuss.

What I will concentrate on here are some important ways that the issue of spirituality appears in ethical thinking of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, especially in their respective visions of best way of life. To a great extent, the deep spirituality of Kierkegaard's life of faith and Nietzsche's life of creative sovereignty manifests itself in those common aspects we have just discussed. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche what is spiritual about the best life has much to do with the individuality of this life and with the stance of overflowing joy and

[136] It would be especially interesting and useful, given the current state of affairs, to compare Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in their respective critiques of Christianity as it exists in the modern world. Unfortunately, such a comparison lies outside the scope of my project here.

gratitude it represents. In addition, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both find spirituality in the process of self-overcoming and 'becoming what you are' which marks both the transition to this best life and a continuing presence within it.

The first point to notice is how central the issue of spirituality is for the ethical ideals of both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. It is probably not surprising that Kierkegaard regards the life of faith to be the most spiritual way of life. But it may be surprising that I consider Kierkegaard's remarks on faith to be not much theological as ethical, especially given that he is famous for so contrasting faith and ethics, e.g. in *Fear and Trembling*. However, as I have suggested before and will clarify here, this contrast between faith and ethics depends upon erroneously conflating ethics as such with 'the ethical' in Kierkegaard more narrow sense. In fact, most of what Kierkegaard says about faith is not theological, but ethical in the sense that it is about how the person of faith comports himself in daily life. Given Kierkegaard's rejection of rational theology, and what we learned about faith in Chapter 1, it should be clear that for Kierkegaard faith is not a matter of adopting a set of theological beliefs. Faith is not a *belief* in a religious doctrine, let alone mere membership in a religious organization. For Kierkegaard, faith is a way of comporting oneself in everyday life. As I have explained it, faith is a way of relating to oneself, others (including God) and the world in thought and action. Faith is a fundamental relationship or orientation toward oneself and everything else. As such, faith is an ethical concept in the broader sense of the term 'ethical' I have been using.

What may be even more surprising, especially for those who mistake Nietzsche for a hard-nosed materialist who wants to do away with all talk of 'spirituality', is that Nietzsche also considers his ideal life to be one of deep and passionate spirituality. In fact, Nietzsche calls us to live an even *more* spiritual life than what we find among religious believers. One of Nietzsche's most insistent and powerful critiques of modern Christianity is that it is not spiritual enough. Nietzsche associates"spirit" with "culture" but also with such things as

"integrity" "virility and pride" "beauty and freedom of the heart," (*A*:22,46). Nietzsche finds that it is this more robust, life-affirming understanding of spirituality that which is denigrated and attacked by Christianity: "Christianity, finally, is the hatred of the *spirit*, of pride, courage, freedom, libertinage of the spirit" (*A*: 21). By way of contrast, Nietzsche envisions his ideal figure as "a 'higher nature,' a more spiritual nature" (*GM* I:16).[137]

In what follows I will demonstrate how Kierkegaard and Nietzsche each understand spirituality as, among other things, an ethical concept. It is an ethical concept in that it involves the individual human self, the development of this self, and how this individual comports himself in daily life. It is important for both thinkers that the best life they advocate is deeply spiritual life, and both critique traditional ethics and traditional religion as lacking this deepest form of spirituality.

Although Kierkegaard believes spirituality also involves a relationship with God, and he would clearly regard God as a spiritual being, Kierkegaard mainly equates 'spirit' and 'spirituality' with the individual human self. When Kierkegaard writes about "the world of spirit" this refers to the realm of human freedom and action, not some ethereal or transcendent 'other' world. For example, when Johannes says that "no cheating is tolerated in the world of spirit" or that "in the world of spirit the only people who are tricked are those who trick themselves" he is clearly referring to the 'world' of human inwardness and action, not some transcendent realm (*FT*:107,125,110). Anti-Climacus makes clear the connection between 'spirit' and individual selfhood in the famous opening lines of *The Sickness Unto Death*: "The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self" (*SUD*:43). Elsewhere, Anti-Climacus uses the terms "spirit" and "self" synonymously (*SUD*:46,57,114). What is specifically spiritual about the self is the free determination of how one will live and how one will relate to oneself, as well as the passion with which one does so. Thus, Anti-

[137] The German term *Geist* can mean either intellect or spirit, but context makes it clear that N is talking about spiritual and not (just) intellectual superiority.

Climacus declares that the "accountability" of despair (i.e., that your despair is your own fault, rather than a mere misfortune), is due to "the fact that the relation [relating to itself] is spirit, is the self" (*SUD*:46).

Kierkegaard's understanding of spirituality can also be seen by way of contrast to what he considers to be lacking in spirituality. What Kierkegaard describes as "spiritlessness" is the state of passionless mediocrity in which one attempts to ignore one's selfhood and abdicate responsibility for oneself. Thus, a person living a life of shallow 'immediacy' "lives in the categories of the sensate, the pleasant and the unpleasant, poo-poos spirit, the truth, etc.; he is too sensate to have the courage to risk and endure being spirit" (*SUD*:73). The category of "ignorant despair," in which one is ignorant of oneself and unwilling to accept responsibility for oneself, is called "spiritless" despair. Kierkegaard is particularly critical of what is sees as the widespread lack of spirituality in the lives of those who claim to be Christians. He suggest that while the ancient 'pagans' were at least moving toward greater spirituality, most people who practice religion in Christendom are moving in the other direction. For Kierkegaard, few lives are less spiritual than the life of the modern-day Christian.

This is not to say that someone living a life of 'spirtless despair' is not in any way 'spirit'. To the contrary, as we saw in chapter 3, the *scandalon* of this life is that one cannot escape one's self as spirit, and the despair of this life is that one misrelates to oneself in trying to do so. Hence, while Anti-Climacus calls someone living this shallow life "spiritless" and lacking a self, speaking more exactly he explains that this person ignores and avoids the fact that he is and remains spirit.[138]

[138] We might compare this spiritlessness to physical atrophy. Avoiding the use of a muscle certainly makes this muscle weaker, but never to the point of justifying this avoidance by making the muscle non-existent; the problem is and remains the atrophy of the neglected muscle. In a similar way, 'spiritless despair' may be described as the atrophy of selfhood in which the self is weakened and diminished but by no means annihilated.

Anti-Climacus suggests that the complacency and mediocrity he finds in modern life is due to this ignorance or avoidance of ourselves as spirit. He explains that "the normal situation is this: that most people live without being properly conscious of being characterized as spirit – and to this one can trace all the so-called security, contentment with life, etc., which is exactly despair." (*SUD*:56) This "spiritless sense of security" deprives a person of the aspiration for anything greater than comfort or pleasure (*SUD*:74). For this reason, Anti-Climacus insists that however "vain and conceited people may be, the conception they usually have of themselves is very humble; that is, they have no conception of being spirit, the absolute that a human can be" (*SUD*:73).[139] Part of what is exalted about the human self considered as spirit is one's freedom to determine and take responsibility for oneself. In *Either/Or* Judge Wilhelm explains that what gives the human self dignity is its ability to freely determine itself and to thereby have a 'history.' But for Kierkegaard what is most exalted about this spiritual conception of the self (so exalted that it is even offensive) is that spiritually considered, the self is 'before God.' From the point of view of faith, what truly gives the self dignity and worth is that it has within itself, at its very core, a relationship with a loving, caring God. The life lived in ignorance or avoidance of oneself as spirit is therefore a life lived in ignorance or avoidance of this relationship. Anti-Climacus explains that faith's view of the self is so exalted that it causes offense. In contrast to this exalted view of the self, Anti-Considers finds pathetic the life lived according to a more mediocre view of the self:

> the only life wasted is the life of one who so lived it, deceived by life's pleasures or its sorrows, that he never became decisively, eternally, conscious of himself as spirit, as self, or what is the same, he never became aware – and gained in the deepest sense the impression – that

[139] In a note on this passage, Hannay usefully explains the difference between the notion of spirit in Kierkegaard and in Hegel: "The phrase points to the contrast between 'spirit' in Hegel's world-historical sense, in which individuals merely participate, and in terms of which Absolute Spirit is an ideal projected into an indefinite future, and 'spirit' in Kierkegaard's individualistic sense, according to which every person potentially is and both can and should become spirit" (*SUD*:172).

there is a God there and that 'he', himself, his self, exists before this God. (*SUD*:57)

This is not to say that a conception of oneself as spirit is all that is required for faith. The path between this shallow 'spiritlessness' and the deep spirituality of faith includes a variety of different forms of despair, each one progressively "more spiritual." The fact that Kierkegaard discusses "spiritual" forms of despair shows that for him mere 'spirituality' is far from sufficient for a life of faith. In his later works in particular, Kierkegaard fills in the details of the specifically (and peculiarly) Christian understanding of spirituality he holds as ideal. For Kierkegaard, this specifically Christian life is the most deeply spiritual life because in it selfhood is most fully developed and one is transparently aware of one's self as including a relation to God as 'the power that established it.' Although the life of faith is the most spiritual life for Kierkegaard, he acknowledges that spirituality is to be found not only in the life of faith. The self is spirit, and therefore human life is a spiritual enterprise, whether we treat it as such or not.

But what it is to treat human life as spiritual is not to suppose some mystical otherworldliness at work behind or above human life. For Kierkegaard (as for Nietzsche), what is spiritual are the struggles of human passion and personality, especially the struggle to develop and enhance our inwardness, our selfhood, and our ways of interacting with all that lies beyond us. Even the despairing struggle to avoid oneself or create a new self is "spiritual" for Kierkegaard, which is why he is clear that "despair is a qualification of spirit." Hence, we can see that Kierkegaard mainly understands spirituality as an ethical concept in our broader sense of the term 'ethical.' We can also see how central this concept of spirituality is for Kierkegaard's overall ethical project; indeed, it is a central issue for all ways of life, not just the life of specifically religious or Christian spirituality.

Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche understands spirituality in relation to human life and ethics in this broader sense. Also like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche thinks of

the best life as the most spiritual life and criticizes lives lived according to traditional ethics and religion for being spiritually mediocre. Nietzsche often talks about "integrity in matters of spirit" and "conscientiousness in matters of spirit" by which he means having a conscience for one's moral judgments and their foundation: "that one makes of every Yes and No a matter of conscience!" (*A*:50,see also A:5,53). This sort of ethical conscientiousness is what Nietzsche calls honesty, claiming it as "the most spiritual will to power" and the distinctive virtue of his ideal 'free spirits' (*BGE*:227). Thus, what Nietzsche means by 'spirit' and 'spirituality' is not anything ethereal and otherworldly; to the contrary, Nietzsche specifically associates 'spirituality' with this-worldly health, beauty, strength and integrity (*A*:46,62). He also associates spirituality with culture (*A*:22). For Nietzsche it is artistic creation and creation in the realm of values, rather than religious adherence, that is the paradigm of spirituality. Thus we can understand in what way Nietzsche expects his ideal figure to have "a more spiritual nature" than what Nietzsche finds in his contemporaries (*GM* I:16).

By way of contrast, Nietzsche ridicules the notion of a "pure spirit" above and beyond human life: "'pure spirit' is pure idiocy" (*A*:14). He argues that such transcendent notions of spirituality represent the contempt for the spirituality of human life by those who are "spiritually limited." Those who posit a perfect, unchanging, transcendent world necessarily degrade 'this' world by way of contrast: "insofar as they affirm this 'other world' – look, must they not by the same token negate the counterpart, this world, our world?" (GS:344) This is why Nietzsche thinks that Christianity represents "hatred of the *spirit*, of pride, courage, freedom, libertinage of the spirit [*libertinage des Geistes*]; Christian is the hatred of the *senses*, of joy in the senses, of joy itself [*Freude überhaupt*]..." (*A*:21). Nietzsche goes so far as to say that Christianity "utters a curse against the spirit, against the *superbia* of the healthy spirit" (*A*:52). He is particularly critical of the Christian conception of a transcendent God (God as 'pure spirit'), which he sees as a nihilistic condemnation of actual human life. Among other conceptions of

the divine, Nietzsche consider the Christian conception of God "the low-water mark":

> God degenerated into *the contradiction of life*, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal *Yes*! God as the declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live! God—the formula for every slander against "this world," for every lie about the "beyond"! God—the deification of nothingness, the will to nothingness pronounced holy! ... *(A*:18)

Likewise, as we saw in Chapter 4, Nietzsche is critical of any conception of ethics that claims to have (and need) a transcendent basis. Nietzsche finds this conception of spirituality and ethics to be the "embodiment of mortal hostility against all integrity, against all *elevation* of the soul, against all discipline of the spirit, against all frank and gracious humanity" *(A*:37). Christianity, according to Nietzsche, is a conspiracy of the spiritually mediocre "against health, beauty, whatever has turned out well, courage, spirit, *graciousness* of the soul, *against life itself" (A*:62). He blames the Christian conception of values for corrupting "even those strongest in spirit by teaching men to consider the supreme values of the spirit as something sinful, as something that leads into error – as temptations" *(A*:5).

Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, thinks there is a more spiritual life than the life lived according to the ethical notions of duty and self-responsibility. Nietzsche associates his ideal 'free spirits' with a "loftly spirituality." Nietzsche clearly agrees with the claim that "'a lofty spirituality is incompatible with any kind of worthiness and respectability of the merely moral man'" even if he finds it more advantageous to "flatter" his 'merely moral' reader by portraying accepted morality as a means to this lofty spirituality:

> [A] lofty spirituality itself exits only as a final product of moral qualities; that it is a synthesis of all those states attributed to the 'merely moral' man after they have been acquired one by one through protracted discipline and practice, perhaps in the course of whole chains of generations; that lofty spirituality is the

> spiritualization of justice and of that benevolent severity which knows itself empowered to maintain order of rank in the world among things themselves - and not only among men. (*BGE*:219)

The idea that ascetic values can be affirmed as a means to a higher type is undoubtedly part of Nietzsche's attempt to seduce us away from ascetic ideals. But nonetheless, as we saw in Chapter 4, it is important to see how the movement away from ascetic ideals is a self-overcoming, and how these ideals are to be used as means of something higher, since this is precisely the 'redemption' Nietzsche calls for.

What is most spiritual for Kierkegaard is the redemption of the self by God and the struggle by the self to accept this redemption. Likewise, I think Nietzsche finds the greatest spirituality in the redemption of human life from the self-hating "curse" of ascetic ideals. Just as the issue of forgiveness is the central issue of redemption for Kierkegaard, for Nietzsche redemption is understood as overcoming ascetic bad conscience. There is a kind of forgiveness or reconciliation in Nietzsche's thinking as well, at least insofar as we come to affirm the whole of our history (*amor fati*), including the reign of ascetic ideals, since this whole history can be the means to Nietzsche's ideal figure as the "ripest fruit" of human development. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the most spiritual life is only attained by progressing beyond (and in some way encompassing, overcoming, and transfiguring) lower levels of selfhood and spirituality.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

In the first part of these conclusions, I will summarize and clarify the ethical project I claim Kierkegaard and Nietzsche mutually share. In the next section, I will explain how this ethical project fits with the projects already pursued in contemporary ethics, specifically the projects of deontology, utilitarianism and virtue ethics. In the final section, I will discuss what further research possibilities emerge once we include the ethical project shared by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in our curriculum of contemporary ethical projects. Throughout this chapter, I will consider objections to my readings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and to my central thesis about the project they have to offer contemporary ethics.

§1 THE ETHICAL PROJECT OF KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE

I will begin by summarizing the ethical project that I explored at length in chapters 1-4. Simply stated, this is the ethical project of illustrating, analyzing, and evaluating different ways of life. In what follows, I will explain each of these sub-tasks in turn. The first point to clarify is what is meant by a 'way of life.' As I see it, we can often helpfully identify a way of life according to its central, guiding *telos* or highest value (or set of highest values). Ultimately, though, what is most germane to a way of life is the way that this *telos* or value is pursued or upheld. More specifically, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche what distinguishes a way of life is the fundamental existential stance someone living this life takes toward existence as a whole: their stance toward themselves, toward other people, and toward the natural world. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, particular values, beliefs, principles, character traits, and practices can be traced back to this fundamental stance and can be understood as manifestations of this same single stance, differentiated according to situation. For this reason, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche each engage in the ethical project of identifying and developing a typology of such stances. Each considers a person's existential

stance or way of life to be the central 'unit' of ethical concern; for both, success or failure, ethically speaking, comes as a whole, as the success or failure of a way of life considered as a whole.

One helpful way of classifying a way of life is according to its central or highest concern. In Kierkegaard's schema, the different ways of life can be defined by their central and characteristic *telos* or value.[140] The aesthetic life (in its various forms) is the life in which enjoyment is the central and highest value. The ethical life (in either its 'active' self-righteous form or 'passive' self-renouncing form) is the life in which ethical righteousness is the central and highest value. Likewise, the religious life ('religiousness B') is the life in which faith, understood as a loving, open relationship with God, is the central and highest value. I think this form of classification works less well for Nietzsche, but Nietzsche does sometimes refer to the ascetic and slavish mode of valuation as 'the morality of pity,' singling out pity as the central and characteristic value.[141] In contrast, we might think of the life of the ancient nobles as centering on the value of honor. In the same way, we might think of the life of creative sovereignty as revolving around the central value of responsibility or creative excellence. So as a kind of shorthand way of classifying a way of life, it may be helpful to refer to a highest *telos* or value, and it seems clear enough that this highest *telos* or value plays an important role in shaping and guiding one's particular actions, beliefs, and decisions within everyday life.

Nonetheless, this method of classification is further refined by both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and for good reason. One problem with this classification method is that a value may appear in more than one way of life, so

[140] It may be helpful to return to our comparison with Aristotle to understand how this works. Aristotle differentiates his 'three most prominent' ways of life according to the characteristic activity pursued in each (the pursuit of enjoyment, political and social activities, or contemplation). He thereby also differentiates these lives according to the highest *telos* of each (attaining enjoyment, political/social excellence, or contemplative excellence).

[141] As Nietzsche declares in *The Antichrist*: "One has ventured to call pity a virtue (- in every *noble* morality it counts as a weakness -); one has gone further, one has made of it *the* virtue, the ground and origin of all virtue – only, to be sure, from the viewpoint of a nihilistic philosophy which inscribed *Denial of Life* on its escutcheon" (*A*:7).

identifying a way of life according to that value can be misleading. For example, in Nietzsche's schema, honesty (without further qualification) is a virtue in the life he rejects as well as the life he holds as ideal. To say 'the life of honesty' is therefore ambiguous, as will be discussed in detail below. As applied to Kierkegaard's schema, this method of classification runs into a similar problem. It is conceivable that someone hold faith or ethical righteousness as a central ideal and yet do so experimentally, i.e., within an aesthetic way of life. (We can imagine the aesthete A's response to the advice Kierkegaard's ethical and religious authors offer: "Yes, everyone ought to live as an ethical person or a religious person… but only for a while, otherwise it would become boring.") Likewise, it seems possible to pursue religious faith as one's highest *telos* but pursue this *telos* as a self-reliantly achieved personal accomplishment, i.e. as part of what he calls the 'ethical way of life'. As we saw in chapter 3, the life of resignation or 'religiousness A', properly classified as a form of the ethical life, is a case in point: here one's relation to God is understood entirely within ethical categories.

One might object that what faith *really* is can only be central to the religious life, and what ethical righteousness *really* is can only be central in the ethical life. One could say that to really hold faith or ethical righteousness as a central value in one's life is incompatible with holding this as an *aesthetic* ideal, as something pursued for the sake of conformity, or as an interesting but temporary experiment. But this talk of "really" holding something as a central value suggests that what is important in a way of life is not so much the content of these highest values, but how they are pursued and upheld. What is crucial for defining a way of life is the *form* the pursuit of this value takes. (As I hope to have shown, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are primarily concerned with the form rather than the content of our beliefs, goals and values.) For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it is of central importance to determine how a person obtains and upholds his or her values, beliefs, and goals. While a lot could be said about how values are pursued and upheld within each way of life, I have shown that

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche converge in explaining this 'how' as a central, fundamental existential stance that underlies a person's particular values, beliefs, actions and character traits.

I have called this an *evaluative* stance for two reasons. First, this stance involves a kind of underlying evaluative conception and judgment with respect to one's life considered as a whole. Simplifying somewhat, we could say that for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, such a stance involves a fundamental evaluative affirmation or condemnation of one's actuality. One can try to avoid, denigrate, or deny oneself and one's actuality, or one can embrace and affirm oneself and one's actuality.[142] In each case, a fundamental value-judgment or value-orientation is established. Secondly, this fundamental stance is evaluative in that it shapes and guides one's other, more particular evaluations. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche one's values, beliefs, judgments, conceptions, commitments, and character traits flow from this fundamental stance. In other words, the evaluative judgment in the fundamental stance translates into a whole variety of particular evaluations. This stance is a way of manifesting one's conceptions of life, one's goals and ambitions for life, and one's most deeply held values; one might say that this stance is the underlying structure of one's commitments to these things. To name a few examples from Nietzsche, this stance determines whether these values are manifested as a way of lashing out at oneself or others (*ressentiment*), or as a way of escaping oneself and others (ascetic nihilism). Alternately, one might hold values as a way of respecting oneself and others (creative sovereignty). Kierkegaard examines the stance of holding values out of conformity or self-debasing, immediate desire (aesthetically), out of self-responsibility or self-reproach (ethically), or out of joyful gratitude (by faith). In

[142] Of course the dialectical structure of this affirmation and denial is much more complicated than these simplified descriptions suggest. For Kierkegaard, there are various ways of 'wanting not to be oneself' including 'wanting to be the self one creates'. As we saw in the chapter on despair, one can deny and try to escape oneself by affirming and embracing another self one would like to have had instead. Likewise, for Nietzsche, it is possible to adopt a life-denying stance as a way of preserving and saying 'yes' to life (asceticism as saving us from the first crisis of nihilism), even if this way of preserving life in the short term is life-denying and counter-productive in the long term (bringing about the current crisis of nihilism.)

each case, there is an evaluative content to the fundamental stance which in some way guides and shapes the evaluative content of the particular judgments, beliefs and values the person holding this stance manifests in daily life. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche portray these more particular evaluations as manifestations of one's overall evaluative stance.

I have also called this fundamental stance an *existential* stance, in part because it is a stance toward existence as a whole and in part because it structures and informs one's everyday existence. Kierkegaard sometimes refers to a way of life as a 'worldview' in reference to the fact that this evaluative stance impacts not only normative claims, but one's conceptions about life in general. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are both interested in how one's fundamental stance manifests itself in the minutiae of everyday life. They both trace the manifestation of this stance to almost absurd levels of particularity (e.g. for Nietzsche, what foods one eats and for Kierkegaard, whether and how one reads the newspaper). Whether or not we accept these extreme examples, it is valuable to note that for both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, one's way of life colors the entire phenomenology of one's everyday existence.

Although calling this stance an "existential" stance may call to mind the later, 20th Century Existentialists, I suspect that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have in mind an ancient model for how such a stance evaluatively shapes the everyday life of one who holds it. In particular, I think Kierkegaard and Nietzsche may have Stoicism in mind. The Stoic stance of resignation regarding 'externals' and resolution regarding one's own moral stature is just such an overall 'existential' stance. In Stoicism, this fundamental stance is a way of relating to oneself (drawing a strict divide between the self and everything else), a way of relating to others (out of compassion, if also resignation), and a way of relating to the world (as Stoicism maintains, it is a proper relation to the facts of the world). Kierkegaard and Nietzsche each include something like this Stoic stance in their respective typologies (as the life of resignation or asceticism), and both position this stance as the central alternative to the best way of life they

advocate instead.[143] As I discussed in the last chapter, I think both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can be understood as advocating something like an inverted Stoicism: a stance embodying all of the Stoic's inner strength while nonetheless remaining resolutely open and engaged with the world of 'externals' from which the Stoic resolutely withdraws.

Another source of this idea of a fundamental existential stance might be found in the theological tradition to which Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both respond. Augustine famously presents the situation of the human soul as suspended between the divine and the bodily; what determines the agent's ethical situation is whether he or she takes a willed stance *toward* God or *away from* God (*conversio* or *aversio*).[144] Kierkegaard modifies this picture by showing that the human self can also turn toward itself or away from itself. The willed stance of *conversio* or *aversio* toward oneself is related to the Augustinian stance of *conversio* or *aversio* toward God, since according to Kierkegaard it is only by turning towards God (as "the power that established the self") that one can turn towards oneself. For Kierkegaard, despair is an aversion (*aversio*) to both oneself and God. I think we can find something parallel in Nietzsche in his idea that one can either turn towards life or away from life. For Nietzsche, the best life is one in which one takes a willed stance of acceptance and affirmation toward oneself. But this stance can only be accomplished if one also takes a stance of acceptance and affirmation toward the whole context of one's existence. For Nietzsche there is also something like the ideal of acknowledging the 'power' that has established one's self, namely the genealogy of one's ideas, beliefs and values, one's physiology and psychology, and the sum of one's experiences. As we discussed in Chapter 4, for Nietzsche it is only by affirming these factors that

[143] Kierkegaard makes explicit reference to Stoicism in relation to both forms of the ethical life. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus labels the despair of 'wanting to be oneself' (both actively and passively): "If a common name were to be applied to this form of despair, one might call it Stoicism, though not just in the sense of the sect" (*SUD*:99). Although Nietzsche obviously rejects the ascetic bent of the Stoic stance, he admires its inner strength or 'hardness.' In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he exhorts his fellow 'free spirits': "let us remain *hard*, we last of the Stoics!" (*BGE*:227).

[144] Vernon Bourke, Ed., *The Essential Augustine*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974), 43-36.

one can affirm one's self since a self is not the disconnected, disembodied subject of Enlightenment thought but is rather the embodiment of everything that established it.

Calling this stance a 'fundamental existential stance' also indicates that I do not want it to be confused with the kind of particular stance one might take in the course of life, e.g. the stance one takes on a particular ethical issue like the death penalty, animal rights, or abortion. Certainly one's fundamental existential stance will affect this more particular kind of stance towards an issue, just as it will affect all one's commitments and values. Possibly one's devotion to such causes will be the central focus one one's life, and thus form a highest *telos* for which one lives. But even then the question remains: how do you relate to this *telos*? The ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche asks: do you relate to this *telos* as a manifestation of a general stance of self-hatred or of self-respect? Does it flow from a stance of ascetic self-denial or stance of joyful self-acceptance, a stance of resentment towards others or a stance of respect and love towards others?

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche ask these questions not just of particular stances, but of particular principles, beliefs, character traits, and actions. These are not just questions about what *motivates* these particular things, but rather questions about the sort of general evaluative schema or context from which these particular things emerge. A way of life is the normative context within which we must understand such particular things. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the fundamental unit of ethical concern is not particular actions, principles or motivations, or even character traits; rather, their concern is the fundamental existential stance underlying a person's entire way of thinking, experiencing, and evaluating. They each develop a typology of different fundamental stances and they each spend considerable effort illustrating how particular beliefs, actions, principles and character traits are regarded or upheld within these different stances. As we saw in chapters 1 and 2, this task of

depicting different ways of life is largely a matter of showing how such a fundamental evaluative stance manifests itself in a person's everyday reality.

The fact that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are primarily interested in the underlying stance behind such particulars helps to explain the frustration scholars sometimes face when trying to derive prescriptions for particular actions or principles from their work. Although I think their work may contain unique and valuable insights with respect to such specifics, often Kierkegaard and Nietzsche leave us with a formal picture out of which more than one particular prescription (or proscription) could be derived. Moreover, I think we miss the greater potential to be found in their work as long as we try to make Kierkegaard and Nietzsche serve the ethical tasks currently pursued in contemporary philosophical ethics. The usefulness of their provocative, witty and psychologically astute insights on particular issues already debated in contemporary ethics should not to be discounted. But if we instead insist on meeting Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on their own territory, I believe we will find that they are undertaking quite a different ethical project than we see prevalent in ethics today. It is not without important connections and points of overlap with debates in contemporary ethics, as I will discuss shortly. But I think the ethical project proposed and followed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is importantly different from the projects pursued by contemporary ethics, and I think it is in proposing and pursuing this project that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can offer the most benefit to contemporary ethics.

However much Kierkegaard and Nietzsche may look to ancient Greek ethics as the model for this project, there seem to be two distinctive features of their approach that could be considered distinctively 'modern.' First, they each address the historical developments in values that have precipitated the contemporary 'crisis' of values they each address, namely the medieval establishment of Christendom and the challenges (and reformulations) of Christianity by the Enlightenment. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both attempt to diagnose and address what they see as the *modern* situation of ethics. I think it is

clear that their efforts are just as valuable for confronting our contemporary situation in ethics as they were in their own time, as perhaps more so. Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes, there is something fittingly modern in the ethical pluralism of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's project. Each present us with different ways of life understood as different paradigms of value, and they each deny that there is any objective, rational, universally valid way of determining which paradigm of value is correct or best. Each way of life has its own notion of what makes life 'good' or 'bad'; even an ethically unconcerned aesthete like Kierkegaard's A has standards of quality for how one should live. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, there is no independent, rationally grounded 'meta-paradigm' of value that determines which of these paradigms of value is 'correct' or superior to the others. This is because there can be no such objective, evaluative 'view from nowhere' outside of and beyond a particular way of life and its paradigm of values by which one could derive an objective judgment of this kind.

How, then, could Kierkegaard and Nietzsche offer any kind of interesting, non-arbitrary analysis and evaluation of different ways of life? How is it that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can deny any objective, universal standards of ethics and yet embark on the task of evaluating different ways of life? Given their mutual denial of any objective evaluations in these matters, what more could we expect from the analysis and evaluation offered by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche other than their own subjective preference regarding these ways of life?

As I see it, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche employ two main methods for addressing this challenge. One method, to be discussed in detail later, is to take the challenge in stride and admit the subjectivity of the ideas and evaluations presented to the reader. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche often openly engaged in polemics, writing in such a way that their own subjective preference for a way of

life is scarcely hidden, even if it is not directly declared.[145] Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both try to *move* their readers, to repell them from ways of life they hold as inferior and pernicious and entice them toward ways of life they hold as superior. (If they each generally refrain from expressing their own preferences too directly, it is because this can hamper the development of individuality, which they each consider to be a significant aspect of this superior way of life.) These attempts to polemically move readers toward a better way of life undoubtedly reflect Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's own personal preferences, but this effort does not rest on these preferences alone. What Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have to say about the worth of different ways of life does not depend upon an unargued bias or prejudice. In order to see why, we must examine the other main method Kierkegaard and Nietzsche employ to meet this challenge. This is the method of analyzing ways of life according to the concept of internal collapse.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche analyze the intricate dialectical interrelations by which some ways of life internally collapse, while others are internally self-strengthening. As I understand it, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche may be subjectivists about values but they not subjectivists about facts. Ways of life may be adopted subjectively, but they must adequately accord with what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche present as objective facts about human life, on pain of becoming self-defeating. As I showed in chapters 3 and 4, some ways of life fail according to their own standards, and they are guaranteed to do so because they represent an antagonistic or escapist relation to oneself and the actuality of human life. Simply put, a subjectively chosen way of life can fail by its own subjective standards when these standards represent an underlying stance of antagonism or escapism with respect to some basic objective facts about the human being

[145] In his early pseudonymous writings Kierkegaard is undoubtedly more guarded than Nietzsche about expressing his own views; but it is arguable that even within the works of 'indirect communication' Kierkegaard's subjective preferences are made manifest. Moreover, Kierkegaard engaged in 'direct communication' of a polemic nature (openly advocating for a religious way of life) throughout his pseudonymous period in the form of edifying discourses. His later work became more openly polemic still, as shown by the fierceness of his views in *The Moment*, which he self-published as a broadside.

holding these standards. Thus, the concept of internal collapse cuts across the question of subjectivity or objectivity of values in an interesting way. Here I think we can understand the primary value of the concept of internal collapse for contemporary ethics. The notion of internal collapse offers a way of making ethical evaluations of ways of life without relying on independent, universal, objective principles but also without abandoning the expectation of something more than an unarguable, subjective preference. In other words, evaluation according to the notion of internal collapse shows how one can abandon reliance on (contentious) objective evaluations without abandoning the notion of objective facts and without abandoning the expectation that ethical evaluations go beyond an emotivist expression of merely subjective preferences.

In showing how the concept of internal collapse can accomplish this, I will first clarify the kind of objective facts Kierkegaard and Nietzsche call upon in analyzing ways of life. These facts can be grouped into two broad categories: general facts about human selfhood and more specific facts about the inner workings of a particular way of life. This first category includes the fairly 'thin' conceptions of human nature we find in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. It may seem surprising to claim that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have a conception of human nature at all, given their reputation as existentialists and given that 'existentialism' is often defined by its dismissal of any notion of human nature or 'essence.' Nonetheless, I think it is clear that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche each rely upon what they take to be some basic, objective facts about human selfhood. For example, for Kierkegaard all ways of life must answer to the fact that one cannot either escape oneself or create oneself. For Nietzsche, all ways of life must answer to other fundamental facts about the human self, such as the fact that one is inescapably an embodied, natural organism with certain interests and needs.

Obviously, these minimal facts fall short of a full-bodied anatomy of human nature, and they seem far from sufficient to ground a positive recommendation of a whole way of living. (In this way Kierkegaard and

Nietzsche differ from Aristotle, for whom a much more substantial notion of human nature serves as the evaluative standard against which different ways of life can be judged. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche generally avoid the teleological view of human nature that we find in Aristotle.) Of course, it is true that for Kierkegaard the best life is one that accords with the fact that one cannot escape or create oneself, and it is true that for Nietzsche the best life is one that accords with the fact that one is an embodied, interested natural organism. But what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have to say to positively recommend these ways of life goes far beyond this correlation with the basic facts of human nature.[146] Often these thin conceptions of human nature can bear on the value of a particular way of life only when combined with the second category of objective facts: facts establishing a much thicker conception of the dialectical 'inner workings' of this particular way of life. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche spend considerable effort exploring facts of this second kind.

Some of these facts about the 'inner workings' of different ways of life are presented as psychological facts. This should not be surprising since Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both saw themselves as psychologists (not in the contemporary, clinical sense, but in the ancient sense in which Plato is also a psychologist.) In their mutual search for an understanding of the inner workings of a way of life, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche present probing psychological portraits of those living this life. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche seek to develop descriptions of ways of life accurate enough such that people living this way of life will recognize themselves in these descriptions. They also seek to establish an understanding of what Nietzsche calls the "morphology" of values, i.e. the dialectical changes and interrelations by which ways of life come to be and cease to be. In pursuing these tasks, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche rely on what they

[146] Nietzsche famously allows that deception, an avoidance of the facts of a situation, may be useful for life (e.g. in avoiding the meaninglessness of life by positing a meaning for suffering.) So 'being true to the facts of life' is not an unqualified value for him. Nonetheless, it is clear that his ideal is a figure who joyfully accepts his own 'naturalness' (including suffering) without the need of fallacious supernatural explanations to give it meaning.

take to be objective facts about the psychology of agents living a certain way of life.

For example, in Kierkegaard's account, the person living the aesthetic life faces the psychological fact that something that has immediate interest does not always have lasting or repeatable interest. What we called 'the problem of means', the need for ever more interesting and enjoyable moments in order to keep oneself minimally entertained, rests on such psychological observations. Here Kierkegaard is making very similar points to those that Plato makes in his psychological portraits of the democratic man and of the tyrant in the *Republic*.[147] Kierkegaard also presents us with what he takes to be a deeper psychological insight into the aesthetic life, namely that one who pursues enjoyment as the highest goal does so as a way of avoiding and escaping oneself. Moreover, Kierkegaard is careful to draw the connections between these deeper facts about the underlying aims and goals of a way of life and its more immediate surface phenomena. As we discussed in chapter 3, the symptoms of dissatisfaction and failure that may surface within a way of life (the *scandalon* or stumbling block over which someone recurrently stumbles) can be traced back to whatever of the self one fails to avoid or whatever of one's self one fails to create as one would like to have it. For example, in Kierkegaard's analysis the recurring boredom and dissatisfaction that haunt the aesthetic life results from the fact that one cannot ever avoid or escape oneself. One seeks satisfaction in entertainment as a way of losing oneself, but since one can never fully lose oneself, one can never be fully satisfied. Thus, the immediate failure within the aesthetic life (the *scandalon* that one is bored or dissatisfied) is the manifestation of the deeper failure of adopting the aesthetic life in the first place (in a futile attempt to escape of avoid oneself). The real problem is not that one is bored, but that one seeks entertainment as one's highest value in the mode of trying to escape oneself.

[147] Plato portrays these men as slaves to their own ever increasing and conflicting desires (*Republic* 561d, 577d).

Yet not all facts contributing to the accounts of internal collapse in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are psychological facts. For example, what Kierkegaard says about the 'guilt trap' plaguing the ethical life does not rest on straightforwardly psychological facts. His point that any particular guilt entails total guilt cannot be understood as saying that whenever one *feels* guilt for one misdeed one therefore *feels* totally guilty. The observation is about the dialectical nature of guilt, the logical relationship between a particular act of wrongdoing and guilt as a qualitative state of being. This relationship holds whether or not there is a corresponding psychological phenomenon. Likewise, Kierkegaard's point about the asymmetry of self-reliance with respect to ethical status, that by one's own self-reliant actions, one can get oneself into guilt, but not out of guilt, is not primarily a psychological observation. It is an observation about the dialectical structure of guilt and the human will. Facts contributing to an account of internal collapse can also be historical facts, especially for Nietzsche. Nietzsche's account of the genealogy of the ascetic and slavish mode of valuation, e.g. that it evolved out of a revaluation of the earlier noble mode of valuation, is presented as a historical account, even if it includes the history of a psychological phenomenon (e.g. *ressentiment*). For want of a better term, we may call all these specific facts about a way of life 'dialectical facts' since they pertain to the dialectical structure of a way of life.

In order to understand how exactly these various kinds of objective facts contribute to the internal collapse of a way of life, we need to understand that whether or not a subjectively chosen way of life collapses internally is not up to the person living this life. The presence or absense of internal collapse is a factual matter, not a matter of subjective judgment. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, whether or not a way of life collapses from despair or nihilism is an objective fact, even if the subject matter of this objective fact is a subjectively chosen stance. This internal collapse of a way of life is guaranteed by (and explained by) a conflict between the factual assumptions and requirements of this way of life and the actual facts of agent's existence. As we saw in chapters 3

and 4, a way of life can be shipwrecked on its own requirements if it runs afoul of objective facts about human nature and about the internal dialectics of this way of life. We can learn *as an objective fact* that a fundamental stance is self-defeating if this stance turns the agent against himself in such a way that what success in this way of life would require from the agent is necessary ruled out by a combination of facts about who the agent is as a human being and facts about what success according to this way of life would really entail. From factual premises about human existence in general and about the specifics of a particular way of life (including what is of greatest value in this way of life and how this value it is pursued) we can come to a factual conclusion that this way of life fails according to its own values and standards.

For example, if it is a dialectical fact of the aesthetic life that one seeks enjoyment as a way of escaping oneself and one requires a complete escape from oneself in order to be aesthetically satisfied, and if it is a fact of human nature that one cannot escape oneself, then we know that the aesthetic life will necessarily fail to attain its goals of self-escape and aesthetic satisfaction. Of course, it may be that only sophisticated (cynical) aesthetes like Kierkegaard's A realize this structure of failure and consciously condemn the aesthetic life as a failure. Kierkegaard would expect that most people living this life would not come to this point of conscious realization or condemnation, but the structure of this life is self-defeating nonetheless.

Of course, analysis based on objective facts does not get us all the way to an objective *evaluation* of the way of life in question. We face Hume's is-ought problem if we try to draw an evaluative conclusion from these factual premises. Just because a way of life can be objectively, factually guaranteed to (subjectively) condemn itself does not mean that we are entitled to the evaluative conclusion that such a way of life is objectively 'bad,' inferior, or unworthy. Importantly, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not try to sneak an objective standard into the picture by assuming that whether or not a way of life collapses internally is a new objective evaluative standard by which to judge ways of life.

How then can the analysis of different ways of life contribute to the evaluation of these ways of life?

The elegance of the notion of internal collapse is that it reveals an *inter-subjective* concurrence on the failure and unworthiness of this way of life. By definition, a way of life that collapses internally fails by its own standards. We also know that this way of life is judged as 'bad' or at least inferior according to the standards of every other way of life. (This follows by definition, since a way of life is defined and differentiated from other ways of life by its standards for how to live. Two ways of life that agree in these highest standards are not in fact distinct.) Therefore, we can conclude that an internally collapsing way of life is deemed inferior or unworthy from all available evaluative perspectives, even if there is no objective evaluative standpoint by which to condemn it non-perspectivally.

For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, careful analysis of a way of life and of human nature can yield factual premises from which we can reach a factual conclusion that there is inter-subjective condemnation of a way of life. In pursuing this reasoning, we do not violate the is-ought or fact-value divide because what we derive from the factual premises and conclusions about the collapse of a way of life is not an evaluative judgment. It is the factual conclusion that all available subjective standards concur in condemning this way of life. We know that a way of life is, in point of fact, condemned by all evaluative perspectives, even if do not know whether, objectively speaking, it *ought to be* condemned.

Yet in an important sense, this inter-subjective condemnation settles the evaluative question of whether or not this way of life is 'good' or worthy of being adopted. Far from facing complete evaluative indeterminancy regarding the worth of different ways of life, as entailed by the extreme subjectivist reading of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the notion of internal collapse allows us to have an important and decisive indicator for evaluating different ways of life. It allows us to see that the worth of a way of life is not completely isolated from the facts

about this life and about human existence; subjectively chosen values need to face up to certain objective facts about human existence. However much Kierkegaard and Nietzsche may be subjectivists regarding values (in the sense that they deny an objective standard of ethical value), they are objectivists with respect to certain relevant facts, facts which can bear on the internal collapse of ways of life.

Importantly, what I have called inter-subjective concurrence should not be confused with a *unanimous agreement* about the worth of a way of life. The concurrence I am referring to is inter-subjective in the sense that all fundamental subjective *standards* concur in condemning a way of life, not in the sense that all human *subjects* actually, consciously agree in condemning it. As I just explained in the example of the aesthetic life, the internal collapse of a way of life is not always, and perhaps not often, known to a person living this way of life. Those living an internally collapsing life will therefore often affirm this life as the best life. (This would seem to follow from the definition of a way of life as an evaluative stance). But whether or not the standards of a way of life condemn themselves and whether the fundamental stance defining this way of life is self-defeating is *not* merely a subjective judgment on behalf of the person living this life. My analysis shows that a way of life can have standards and goals which condemn themselves or guarantee their own failure regardless of whether or not someone living this life consciously condemns himself or considers his life a failure. The underlying cause of the self-condemnation of an agent's standards is the agent's stance of antagonism or aversion toward himself; this antagonism and aversion may be present regardless of whether or not the agent consciously pursues this antagonism or aversion.

The metaphor of disease favored by both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche further explains this important point. Just as a disease need not manifest itself in noticeable symptoms, the internal collapse of a way of life need not manifest itself in noticeable symptoms of failure. For example, the ethical person in Judge Wilhelm's model may think that he is innocent or ethically excellent; he may not

feel any guilt at all. But according to Kierkegaard, this does not mean that he is not guilty or that his way of life does not suffer from the internal collapse that this guilt represents. To use another metaphor favored by Kierkegaard, internal collapse is the 'shipwreck' of a subjectively upheld stance as this stance runs aground on the actuality of the agent's existence. This shipwreck is guaranteed by the fact that the agent's way of life represents a willed stance of avoidance or denial of the agent's actuality. Therefore, it is not necessary that these agents consciously condemn themselves or this way of life; the standards of this way of life can condemn this way of life. There can be inter-subjective concurrence according to the standards of various ways of life even if there is not a conscious unanimous *agreement* among the actual human subjects adopting these standards.

Before continuing on to discuss the evaluation of ways of life more fully, I will pause to consider two related objections to what has been said so far about the ethical project I ascribe to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. The first objection is regarding the descriptive part of this task. It would seem that the ethical project I attribute to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche includes an attempt to 'pigeonhole' actual individuals, classifying them according to a theoretically worked out typology of different ways of life. But how can this square with their mutual advocacy of individuality discussed in the last chapter? Can we really ascribe to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche precisely the kind of reductive philosophical project that they each so often ridicule?

In illustrating the diverse typology of existential stances, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not assume that the typologies they establish in their writings will 'pigeonhole' each actual individual. Kierkegaard's use of first-person pseudonyms, and his repeated insistence on the failure of systematic thought to address the individual self in its concrete particularity, testify to the efforts he makes to distance himself from such a view. Likewise, however much Nietzsche may generalize, he is also clear that he is not presenting a systematically complete or final typology of ways of living. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche

would probably admit to the crudity and incompleteness of their respective typologies. This is because both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche recognize that the endless diversity of life, combined with the often inexpressible particularity of an actual human life, will always make a mockery of attempts to reduce this diversity and particularity to a theoretically complete typology. As I will discuss shortly, the aim of the ethical 'types' Kierkegaard and Nietzsche present is not to reductively 'pigeonhole' the individual into a neat conceptual system, but rather to serve as general guideposts for our ethical self-knowledge and navigation.

The second objection pertains to the way this ethical project analyzes failure in terms of internal collapse. Usually we think of ethical failure as the failure to live up to some ethical standard. If it is true instead that ethical failure is the built-in weakness and collapse of a way of life, how does this leave room for personal responsibility? Is it 'bad' to fail to live up to standards which are themselves failing and 'bad'? More importantly, how can a person be culpably responsible for living a way of life that *just happens* to collapse internally, especially if this person is unaware of this internal collapse? It would seem that someone living an internally collapsing way of life is no more morally culpable for this collapse than someone living in a building that is internally collapsing is morally culpable for the collapse of this building.

For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, an agent's primary responsibility is not to fulfill whatever standards one happens to adopt, but to adopt standards that express a stance of self-acceptance and transparency regarding the facts of human actuality, rather than a stance of self-avoidance or self-denial. One's primary responsibility is to accept the reality of one's self and one's life, including one's past and one's potential for the future. Someone who adopts a stance of self-avoidance or self-denial may be quite 'responsible' in fulfilling the particular duties within this stance, but they still fail to have the kind of individual responsibility Kierkegaard and Nietzsche espouse.

Moreover, ethical failure is not that one *happens* to have a way of life with an internal flaw; after all, this internal flaw is a *willed* stance of self-avoidance or self-denial. Each individual is responsible for willing whatever stance toward existence he or she adopts. The possibility of changing one's stance makes this responsibility more acute: to remain in a failing way of life means to continually will to remain in this way of life. One's degree of culpability in continuing to will to avoid or attack oneself is proportional to the degree to which one is consciously aware of this will. But this does not mean that some people are so ignorant of themselves and their way of life that they are in no way culpable for adopting or continuing a despairing or nihilistic way of life. As Kierkegaard rightly argues, ignorance of one's actuality as a self can never be so complete as to be exculpatory since complete ignorance of one's self must involve a willed and culpable self-deception.[148] So the internal collapse of a way of life might be endemic to that way of life, and this can be thought of as an internal flaw in this way of living, but this does not in any way detract from the personal responsibility of those who adopt or continue in this way of life. Although it is a fact that a way of life collapses, what this means if we spell it out further is that within this way of life it is a fact that one willfully turns away from or against oneself. The ethical failure *is* this willful stance, and this willful stance is clearly a matter of the agent's individual responsibility.

The next point to discuss is what I have called the polemic element of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's project; this project is polemic in the very broadest sense that it has the practical aim of moving readers to recognize something about their ethical situation and to improve this situation (if need be). Kierkegaard and Nietzsche provide illustrations of different ways of life that they hope will be accurate enough such that their readers can recognize

[148] As we saw in Chapter 3, Kierkegaard discusses the most intense form of despair as 'the demonic' in which a person is fully conscious of the despair of his way of life but continues to will it out of spite. In both *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard also explores the case of someone who has only the vaguest notion of doing wrong; Kierkegaard suggests that even in these cases, persisting in willing what is wrong is a culpable failure.

themselves somewhere within these illustrations. Clearly, one purpose of these types is to aid with self-knowledge. We can think of the different ethical types discussed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as different guideposts or terrain markers offered as a way of roughly mapping out the various territories of human existence. These terrain markers are especially useful for locating oneself ethically, i.e., for understanding the way of life one currently lives.[149] The deep analysis of these ways of life offered by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also allows readers to understand the inner workings of the life they live. This analysis may help the reader to realize the deeper failure behind recurrent disappointments or failures within the reader's way of life.

These terrain markers can be useful not only for locating oneself within a way of life, but also in navigating between ways of life. After all, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both believe the human self to be something dynamic rather than static; human life is a matter of continual becoming, not of static being. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche the true question is not 'what kind of ethical type am I?' but 'what kind of ethical type am I *becoming*'? The illustrations and analysis offered by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche allows us to understand what Nietzsche calls the "morphology" of how we come to adopt or abandon different ways of life. With the help of the rough maps of ethical terrain provided by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, one can better navigate this process of becoming. Of course neither Kierkegaard and Nietzsche offer an exact prescription for how to make the switch to a better way of life; as we have seen, their analysis of this change as somehow emerging from the collapse of a way of life remains somewhat scant. Nonetheless, it is evident that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are concerned to prompt such a change, and it is clear that the ethical types they provide can help one to navigate this change.

Moreover, the analysis showing that some ways of life collapse internally may also help to *motivate* someone living a collapsing life to abandon it.

[149] As the metaphor of guideposts suggests, there is no need to find oneself in the exact position of these 'types' in order to take one's bearings from them; one can take bearings from a guidepost at quite a distance.

Likewise, the analysis showing that other ways of life are self-strengthening could motivate someone to adopt such a life. This motivation is part of the overall polemic task of moving the reader from one way of life to another. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do this by providing the reader with positive portraits of what they take to be the best way of life and scathingly negative portraits of other ways of life. The reader is meant to recognize himself within, and be repelled by, Kierkegaard's descriptions of the various forms of the aesthetic and ethical ways of life and Nietzsche's descriptions of the various forms of the ascetic or slavish ways of life. But the reader is also meant to aspire toward the life of faith or the life of creative sovereignty that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche respectively propose as positive alternatives. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not just establish guideposts so that readers can locate themselves and navigate through the different territories of human existence. They also polarize these posts such that their readers are attracted to the ways of life Kierkegaard and Nietzsche take to be best and repelled from ways of life they take to be inferior.

This attraction and repulsion is achieved partly through the dramatic and rhetorical presentations Kierkegaard and Nietzsche give to the ways of life they illustrate. Neither offers a straightforwardly descriptive account of a way of life. These descriptions always include rhetorical coloring meant to serve their polemic aim of prying the reader away from his attachment to a collapsing way of life and enticing the reader to adopt what Kierkegaard or Nietzsche take to be a higher, more worthy way of living. But this task is not accomplished by dramatic and rhetorical tricks alone; the polemic side of their project is not the task of getting others to live according to the author's own ideals for how to live. It is important to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that their readers not just blindly obey their rhetorical prompting or 'take their word for it' with respect to how to live. They each urge a deep searching within oneself for the truth of one's situation, and they each urge a way of life that is transparently (if not consciously) aware of this situation.

This is another reason why the factuality of their analysis of ways of life is so important. As I have said, it is important that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche present portraits of different ways of life that are accurate enough that someone living this life can recognize himself in the portrait provided. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also seek to provide objective analysis of the inner workings of these ways of life, revealing their internal weaknesses or strengthens, such that their readers can recognize underlying, fundamental sources of failure that may not be apparent otherwise. If it is true that the entire descriptive task of illustrating and analyzing different ways of life is meant to serve the polemical task of moving the reader from one way of life to another, this does not impugn the factuality of these descriptions. Nor does the polemic task of moving the reader toward one way of life and out of another impugn the autonomy of this individual. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are careful to seduce their readers in such a way that they can Socratically withdraw from the reader's decision; each carefully avoids any claims to authority that would allow their readers to become mere followers of teachers of individuality rather than individuals in their own right.

One important method Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both use to polemically 'move' their readers is what I have elsewhere referred to as a kind of Socratic 'trick.' Consider the method Socrates adopts in the *Phaedrus*. Socrates wants to persuade the young and impressionable Phaedrus to abandon his love of rhetoric and to adopt a love of wisdom (i.e. philosophy) instead. His method of persuasion is a kind of teleological trick: he leads Phaedrus to believe that if he really wants to pursue rhetoric, "true rhetoric," he needs to know the different types of souls and what is good for each, i.e. he needs to pursue philosophy. In other words, Socrates sells philosophical inquiry as something valuable as a means to rhetorical skill. Of course Socrates does not think that philosophy is or should be the handmaiden of rhetoric; he suggests otherwise only because he believes that once Phaedrus pursues philosophy he will realize the superiority of the pursuit of wisdom to the ability to manipulate opinion. In other words, Socrates uses the values and goals that Phaedrus currently has to 'trick' him into

adopting other values and goals. We can understand this trick as a form of irony: Socrates suggests something that he does not straightforwardly believe because in doing so he will bring Phaedrus to his own realization of the truth.

This is a use of Socratic irony that I think Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both employ frequently. Consider how Kierkegaard's Judge Wilhelm confronts the aesthete A: he does not argue directly for the ethical life. Rather, he argues that the aesthete's life can never attain satisfaction, and that aesthetic satisfaction can only be attained in the ethical life. The first part of this argument relies on the aesthete's current values in order to prompt the aesthete to realize the failure of his way of life. The second part of this argument relies on the aesthete's current values in order to prompt the aesthete to adopt a different way of life. As we have seen, in Kierkegaard's schema the central *telos* or value of each despairing way of life is only fulfilled in a higher way of life, once this *telos* or value is no longer central. For Kierkegaard, the ethical project we are discussing is Socratic in that it aims to confront people where they are in their lives and lead them, by their own current goals and values, into a better way of living.[150] In a similar manner, there are a number of element's to Nietzsche's writings which have the structure of this Socratic 'trick'. For example, Nietzsche's call for us to turn pity against pity and guilt and against guilt utilizes the values we currently have in order to lead us to new values. As we saw in Chapter 4, the "art of conscience-vivisection" that is has been refined in the long reign of ascetic ideals can utilized in trying to turn us against the *ressentiment* behind these ascetic ideals. Likewise, I think it is clear that Nietzsche appeals to his reader's admiration for antiquity in his attempts to turn them against the ascetic ideals of Christianity. Perhaps most famously, Nietzsche utilizes the

[150] We can think of this as the evaluative equivalent to the *elenchus* in which Socrates confronts someone's currently held beliefs. Using these beliefs, Socrates leads his interlocutor through a series of steps to a thesis different from (and even opposed to) these initial beliefs. One difference between the evaluative and the epistemic version of this 'trick' might be that in the evaluative version one aims not at an eventual contradiction, but an eventual shift from one way of valuing to another.

ascetic commitment to the value of truthfulness in order to reveal the self-contradictory and self-defeating nature of the ascetic mode of valuation.

§2 THE VALUE OF THIS ETHICAL PROJECT FOR CONTEMPORARY ETHICS

My central thesis is that the most valuable thing that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have to offer contemporary ethics is the ethical project just described in §1. I am tempted to say that if I have done an adequate job of tracing and explaining this ethical project, the value of this project should already be plain for all to see. Nonetheless, it may help to summarize some of the more significant advantages to be gained by adding this ethical project to the curriculum of ethical projects currently pursued. In short, I believe Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's project allows a deeper, more comprehensive, and more personal or individual view of ethics than we often find in contemporary ethical thinking. It allows a *deeper* view of ethics in that it explores the evaluative foundation underlying the particular entities which form the concern of other ethical projects, i.e., particular actions, principles, and character traits. It allows a *more comprehensive* view of ethics in that it explores the broader context within which such particular things find their full meaning, including the personal, historical, psychological, and physiological context of ethics often ignored by these other ethical projects. Lastly, it allows a *more personal or individual* view of ethics in that it takes into account the individual's own particular goals and values. Instead of addressing the ethical agent *qua* human being, as most ethical projects do, the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche addresses the agent as a particular individual with particular commitments and values that shape the ethical reality of this individual's life at the most basic level.

I believe that the substantial aspects of these claims have already been demonstrated, i.e., that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche present us with an ethical project that is admirably deep, broad, and individual in the ways just discussed. What remains to examine is the *comparative* aspects of these claims, namely that the project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is deeper, broader, and more individual

than alternative approaches to ethics currently predominant in philosophical ethics. As we shall see, these comparative claims are most applicable with respect to the forms of principle-based, action-centered ethics dominant today, namely Kantian deontology and utilitarian consequentialism. The ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is quite explicitly critical of these ethical projects and can even be read as a reaction against them. In contrast, the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is much more in harmony with the project of contemporary virtue ethics. Since I believe we find something very much like the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in Aristotle, and since Aristotle is often taken as the paradigm virtue ethicist, it can even be argued that the ethical project I am presenting somehow fits within, or is some version of, the ethical project of virtue ethics. However strong this comparison may be, I think important differences remain between the ethical project I find in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and some of the more usual projects of contemporary virtue ethics.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche each have a wide range of attacks on traditional forms of ethics, especially deontology and consequentialism. An exploration of their critiques (especially Nietzsche's) has already been the subject of several extensive studies.[151] I hope to have added to this discussion by showing (in chapters 3 and 4) that what is most fundamentally wrong with the predominant forms of ethics, according to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, is that a life lived according to these ethics collapses internally. But to accept this criticism requires that we accept the overall project in which it is found. Our task now is to give a kind of broad-strokes defense of my claim that the ethical project we find in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche should be pursued since it is often comparatively deeper, more comprehensive, and more individual than the

[151] On the Nietzsche side, consider Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, (London: Routledge, 2002). On the Kierkegaard side, consider Klaus-M Kodalle, "The Utilitarian Self and the 'Useless' Passion of Faith," in Hannay and Marino, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and Bruce Kirmmse, "Kierkegaard and MacIntyre: Possibilities for Dialogue," in Davenport and Rudd, eds. *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2001), 191-210l.

ethical projects of deontology or utilitarianism. Despite their manifest differences, I will treat deontology and utilitarianism 'of a piece.' My reason for doing so is that they share what is most germane to the comparison with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, namely an ethical project that seeks to establish universal rational principles for distinguishing right from wrong actions.[152]

I should clarify from the start that I do not think the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is necessarily exclusive of ethical principles or ethical thinking about the worth of particular actions. My thesis is not that the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche somehow can or should replace these more traditional ethical projects. To the contrary, I am inclined to believe that these traditional projects are valuable and even necessary to ethics as a whole. Ultimately, I advocate a kind of pluralist approach to ethics in which the projects of action-centered ethics, virtue ethics and way-of-life ethics are all pursued simultaneously. I even believe that the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can have positive contributions to make to deontology and utilitarianism, despite the hostility Kierkegaard and Nietzsche themselves may have had to them. For example, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche could both contribute greatly to the understanding of autonomy and its relation to human dignity, which is central to Kantian theory. Likewise, their respective conceptions of the best way of life could contribute to the understanding of the 'utility' that we would want to maximize in consequentialist theories.

The ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche offers a deeper view of ethics than we often find in principle-based, action-centered ethical projects in the sense that it reveals something more fundamental at work behind these actions and principles. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the central unit of ethical concern is a way of life considered as a whole. For them, the evaluative basis of one's particular actions and judgments is not a universal principle but rather the fundamental existential stance that defines this way of life. Actions

[152] Although there may be other forms of deontology and utilitarianism, this is the ethical project of the forms of deontology and utilitarianism I will be discussing.

and principles flow from the agent's overall existential stance and can be fully understood only as manifestations of this stance. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the worth of a given action or principle depends largely upon the worth of the existential stance within which this action or principle is found. Thus, an ethical project that explores these existential stances provides a deeper, more fundamental view of ethics than an ethical project that explores only those things that emerge from these stances.

For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, to examine an action according to the intentions behind this action or the consequences that follow from it leaves us with a partial and relatively shallow understanding of the ethical situation at hand. Both one's intentions and the value one places on these consequences emerge from more deeply held beliefs or principles, as Kant and Mill (separately) acknowledge. Indeed the central thrust of Kant's deontology and Mill's utilitarianism is to set out the fundamental principles upon which the worth of particular intentions or consequences are based. Yet Kierkegaard and Nietzsche insist that these fundamental principles (the categorical imperative, the utility principle) in turn emerge from an even more deeply held evaluative stance, a fundamental evaluative orientation one takes toward oneself, others and the world. Deontology and consequentialism do not dig deeply enough into the ethical situation to find the evaluative basis of either the kinds of actions these theories evaluate or the principles they use to evaluate them.[153]

Another way to express this point is to say that for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it is not enough to evaluate actions in terms of their correlation with a universal ethical principle, however foundational this principle may be and however we spell out the nature of this correlation. Since both one's actions and one's principles flow from the same fundamental stance, it will not suffice to simply demonstrate an appropriate correspondence between these actions and

[153] Moreover, according to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, deontology and consequentialism are digging in the wrong place; an emphasis on finding principles that are universal and rational can come at the cost of missing the diverse ways that someone can uphold such principles.

principles. This is because an ethical principle (e.g. the categorical imperative or the utility principle) may be an expression of a stance of despair or *ressentiment*. If so, then showing that an action fulfills the categorical imperative or the utility principle does not yet get us all the way to understanding either the nature or the worth of this action.

Now it may be objected that Kant and Mill also dig deeper than the foundational principles they offer. Kant grounds the categorical imperative in the 'good will,' and Mill grounds the utility principle in the utilitarian conscience. I think Nietzsche has a reply to this objection, however. In Nietzsche's schema, an action or principle may be an expression of what Kant calls 'the good will' or it may be an expression of the kind of utilitarian 'conscience' Mill advocates. But if this 'good will' or 'conscience' are themselves grounded in an even deeper will to self-effacement and self-avoidance, then these actions may be contemptible after all despite, or rather *because of,* their successful correspondence with this 'good will' or 'conscience.' An analysis that stops short of exploring this deeper, existential stance will necessarily give us a shallow and flawed assessment of the ethical situation at hand. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both believe that much of what is praised by traditional ethics is in fact not worthy of praise, and may even be contemptible. Their complaint is not so much that people hypocritically fail to act on their own principles, but rather than *both* these actions *and* these principles may be fundamentally flawed, e.g. if they emerge from a fundamental existential stance that is nihilistic or despairing.[154]

One might also claim that the ethical project pursued by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is deeper than deontology and consequentialism in the sense that it explores the issue of spiritual depth and its relation to ethical excellence, as

[154] This is another reason why I think that emphasizing the notion of 'authenticity' in relation to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche may be misleading. Neither thinker accepts that 'being true to one's principles' is sufficient for ethical excellence, or that hypocritically failing to live up to one's principles is the primary form of ethical failure. One may dutifully fulfill all one's deeply, genuinely, 'authentically' held principles, but if these principles are themselves expressions of despair or nihilism, this strict adherence is an expression of despair and nihilism, and hence of ethical failure.

discussed in the last chapter. Certainly I think it is an advantage to be able to explore such issues, but in claiming that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project is deeper than traditional ethical projects, I would like to preserve the philosophical sense of 'deeper' in the sense of 'more fundamental'. I believe this point about addressing spirituality can be best understood alongside a cluster of similar concerns as part of my second claim that the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche provides us with a *more comprehensive* view of ethics than we find in deontology and utilitarianism. It is more comprehensive in the sense that it takes into account the broader context in which ethics manifests itself in the actuality of lived experience. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, particular actions and principles must be understood not only as emerging from a more fundamental ethical stance, but also as fitting into a rich and often complex ethical context. This context includes the interconnections between different aspects of one's life and between one's various types of values (e.g. aesthetic or religious values). As we saw in chapters 1 through 4, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche trace a complex map of the dialectical and evaluative interconnections within a way of life. In doing so, they provide a rich context in which the meaning and value of particular actions, beliefs and principles can be more fully understood.

Importantly, this ethical context also includes the historical context in which one's values are formed and adopted, whether this be the personal history of the agent or the cultural history of the agent's society, or both. For Kierkegaard, ethical projects that are action-centered and based on universal principles fail to address the individual agent in the temporal context of the agent's life. Of particular importance for Kierkegaard is the fact that these theories always present us with a view of ethics in which the agent is *about to act* and the central question is how to ensure that the agent goes on to act in a morally good or permissible way. For Kierkegaard, however, a central question facing the ethical agent is how to deal with one's past (in particular, one's guilt for past misdeeds) and how to deal with one's future (in particular, how one

relates to one's future hopes and goals). In other words, Kierkegaard is interested in the personal context which comprises the ethical reality for the agent. For Kierkegaard, the ethical meaning of a particular action or belief should always be understood within this context. This view contrasts sharply with the standard versions of deontology and consequentialism, which discount consideration of this broader context as ethically irrelevant.

The emphasis on universal principles in deontology and consequentialism also neglects the kind of genealogical understanding of values developed by Nietzsche. Nietzsche's genealogical studies usually explore the social history of ethical values, but Nietzsche is also interested in the personal history of agents, e.g., as they revaluate their values and overcome themselves. In either case, the notion of a genealogy of morality means that the precepts of morality are not timeless, 'eternal', universal values. According to Nietzsche, approaches to ethics that do not take this context into account necessarily fail to grasp the meaning and value even of the moral beliefs and principles they hold most dear. Nietzsche seeks a broader view that examines ethics without abstracting from the context of actual lived experience, as ethical projects based on universal principles typically do.

Similarly, Nietzsche complains that these approaches to ethics fail to grasp the physiological context within which ethical evaluations arise. We do not have to go so far as to wonder about the moral affects of food, as Nietzsche does, to recognize that there is an important, bodily aspect to human agency often ignored by traditional forms of ethics. Nietzsche addresses the important question of what physiological, social, and psychological conditions are required for autonomy and individuality. Likewise, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are interested in the psychological aspects of ethical situations, another issue often ignored by principle-based approaches to ethics. I see it as a great advantage that the ethical project I am advocating that it is more attentive to these areas of human existence and that it is open to knowledge about these areas gained from

psychology, psychiatry, physiology, etc. In doing so, this project is better able to address ethics within the full breadth of its context within human experience.

As my point about incorporating the historical context of values suggests, the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche incorporates the important issue of substantial evaluative *change* in a way that seems anathema to ethical projects based on universal principles. As we have seen, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are primarily interested at a change in values at the most fundamental level, i.e., a change in one's fundamental stance and way of life. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, other more superficial changes, e.g. amending one's principles without abandoning the collapsing stance behind them, are like symptomatic treatments for an illness: they may well make the root cause of the symptoms, the disease itself, much worse. We have seen how trying to modify a collapsing way of life instead of abandoning it can often further intensify the despair or nihilism of this way of life. Thus, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche pursue not only a typology of different ways of life but also the morphology of these ways of life, how they "live, grow, beget, and perish," as Nietzsche says (*BGE*:186). As I discussed in section 1 of these conclusions, the polemic side of their task includes Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's attempts to enact or prepare the way for this change. But they are also interested in observing what the various dialectical paths by which values and ways of holding values evolve (or more often, devolve.) It seems that this attentiveness to changes in ethics and the importance of change at a fundamental level is systematically neglected in an ethics based in supposedly timeless, universal principles.[155]

Following from what has already been said, a final way that the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is more comprehensive than these other projects lies in their ability to incorporate a plurality of different evaluative perspectives and to understand that the agent's ethical actuality always presents

[155] Traditional rationalist ethics can account for change only in the sense that an agent can come to do what is ethically correct, or can lapse in a commitment to do what is ethically correct. The complex dialectical changes of values traced by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are not usually considered.

itself within one or another of these perspectives. This sort of ethical perspectivism is valuable but is largely absent from contemporary ethical debate. One of the ways that the thinking of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is peculiarly (perhaps even prophetically) able to address the contemporary ethical situation is in their foundational assumption of a plurality of different ethical perspectives, "moralities," or life-views corresponding to a plurality of different ethical 'types' or ways of life. Kierkegaard's project of exploring different ways of life from within, in the first person perspective of someone living this life, and his Socratic refusal to play the judge among the various ways of life he depicts, testifies to his commitment to this ethical pluralism. Likewise, Nietzsche's perspectivism and rejection of universalism testify to his own commitment to this ethical pluralism. As I have shown, the fact that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can consider a plurality of evaluative perspectives, none of which is deemed objectively, universally right or wrong, does not cripple their ability to provide compelling evaluations of these various perspectives. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are perspectivists but not utter relativists; in fact, few writers are simultaneously so passionately opinionated and yet so opposed to proclaiming these opinions as universal truths.

In large part as a consequence of taking this deeper, more comprehensive, and more pluralistic approach to ethics, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can offer an ethical project that is more individual or personal than universalist ethical projects, which typically strive to be impersonal. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche acknowledge the need for ethics to address individuals as the particular individuals they are and not merely as instances of the general type 'human being'. Unlike deontology and consequentialism, which deliberately exclude such things from consideration, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche take the agent's personal goals and values into account. In fact, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the ethical reality of the agent's situation is in large part set by this agent's individual goals and values insofar as the agent's way of life is an expression of

the agent's goals and values. Their approach is therefore more attuned to the personal, individual aspects of ethics in actual human life.

Kierkegaard gives an interesting existentialist critique of principle-based ethics that further explains this point about individuality. In *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard complains that "nowadays people are supplied with rules of careful conduct and ready-reckoners to facilitate judgment" (PA:35). The moral calculus offered by different principles, e.g. Kant's categorical imperative or Mill's utility principle, provides a universal test by which any rational agent can determine the worth of an action. Perhaps such a calculus could be useful for informing individual, autonomous decision-making, but Kierkegaard thinks it is all too often used as a *substitute* for such individual decision making. These 'ready reckoners' function like some kind of ethical pocket calculator: given an abstracted, depersonalized description of the agent's situation as input, these principles automatically calculate the output in the form of a recommendation or requirement for how to act. They thereby allow an agent to avoid a passionate, individual response to the ethical situation: "'On principle' a man can do anything, take part in anything and himself remain inhuman and indeterminate" (PA:74). The person who treats others via abstract duty becomes a cold and inhuman abstraction. This person thereby lacks what Kierkegaard takes to be human decency: "It is acting 'on principle' which does away with the vital distinction which constitutes decency. For decency is immediate […] It has its seat in feeling and in the impulse and consistency of an inner enthusiasm" (PA:74). According to Kierkegaard, an agent who lacks such passion and enthusiasm lacks human decency no matter how acceptable or meritorious the action done 'on principle' may be. Kierkegaard concludes that acting 'on principle' can be an escapist attempt to "avoid all personal responsibility" (PA:74). Since Kierkegaard thinks that ethics properly conceived is a matter of one's particularity, passion, and inwardness, to rely on abstract universal principles to determine one's decisions constitutes an avoidance of one's responsibility to face life ethically in the fullest sense.

Nietzsche also has specific critiques of impersonal principles. Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche thinks that acting on such principles is anathema to individual responsibility in the fullest sense. As we have seen, Nietzsche's ideal of responsibility is a sovereign conscience guided not by a consideration of universal principles but rather by one's own most deeply personal passions, goals, and interests. The sovereign individual's autonomy is, as Nietzsche says, "mutually exclusive" of the 'moral' approach to ethics relying on impersonal principles (*GM* II:2). Nietzsche also sees the will to an impersonal, unegoistic approach to ethics as a sign of declining vitality:

> A word on Kant as *moralist*. A virtue has to be our invention, our most personal defence and necessity: in any other sense it is merely a danger. What does not condition our life harms it: a virtue merely from a feeling of respect for the concept 'virtue,' as Kant desired it, is harmful. 'Virtue', 'duty', 'good in itself', impersonal and universal – phantoms, expressions of decline, of the final exhaustion of life […] What destroys more quickly than to work, to think, to feel without inner necessity, without a deep personal choice, without *joy*? as an automaton of 'duty'? *(A:*11)

Although aimed at Kant in particular, Nietzsche's criticism is clear that what is objectionable is "any sacrifice to the Moloch of abstraction" *(A:*11). The ethical projects of deontology and consequentialism seem structurally unfit to provide the kind of depth, breadth and individuality that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche demand from ethical thinking.

Of course we should not ignore the value that the impersonal approach to ethics offers. This abstraction gains ethical projects like Kantian deontology or Millian utilitarianism the ability to be universal and wide-ranging (applying always and to everyone) while also being specific and decisive (telling the agent exactly how to act.) On one hand, we might question whether this universality and specificity is even attainable (this is surely one of the concerns Kierkegaard and Nietzsche share). But even supposing it were attainable, the various objections just raised show that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche would still condemn this approach to ethical thinking. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it is not worth

trading passionate interest and personal engagement for universality, nor is it worth trading individual responsibility for action-guiding specificity. Even supposing we could have an ethical calculator that would unfailingly calculate our duty in any given instance, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche give reasons why relying on this ethical calculator would not be a good way to live. This is not to say that they believe the ethical recommendations of deontology and utilitarianism are wrong. I think the best way to express their objection is to say that these approaches to ethical are insufficient, that without reflecting on ethics in a deeper, broader and more individual way, ethical thinking remains unprepared to understand or respond to the ethical actuality of people's lives.

Turning now to a comparison with virtue ethics, we find that much that serves as a basis of contrast between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project and action-centered, principle-based approaches to ethics instead serves as a basis of comparison with virtue ethics. Like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, virtue ethicists often insist upon understanding actions as flowing from a more fundamental basis (an agent's character) and as having meaning only within a rich personal and social context. This comparison was suggested in the introduction, where I introduced the ethical project I find in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche by pointing to some similar ideas in ancient Greek virtue ethicists like Plato and Aristotle. Other scholars have already explored a number of ways in which Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, considered separately, can be understood as contributing to the continuing tradition of virtue ethics.[156] I believe the comparison between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that I have drawn further elucidates a deep connection between these thinkers and virtue ethicists. To my knowledge, no one has yet pointed out that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche share

[156] For example, with respect to Nietzsche and virtue ethics see Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Robert Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Robert Solomon & Kathleen Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2000). With respect to Kierkegaard and virtue ethics see Davenport and Rudd, eds. *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2001), and Robert C. Roberts, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and a Method of 'Virtue Ethics'" in Matustik and Westphal, eds. *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

something very close to Aristotle's question of the worth of different 'ways of life' (*bios*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I believe the insights gained from comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's pursuit of this question can yield valuable contributions for contemporary virtue ethics.

For example, I think that incorporating Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project allows virtue ethics to answer a number of objections that it frequently faces. Consider three objections that Robert Louden raises in his essay "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics"[157]:

a) Negativity Objection: "Most of the work done in this genre has a negative rather than a positive thrust" (VE, 204). As I discussed above, this objection is also frequently pressed against Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In reply, I hope to have shown that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche each present us with a unique and compelling positive vision of the best way of life. In fact, I would argue that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do more than any other modern thinker to develop a unique and compelling positive ideal for how to live in the modern world. Although I think there has been much work done in virtue ethics to answer this objection independently, I think virtue ethics could answer this objection much more forcefully if it incorporated the positive ideals presented by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

b) Modern Pluralism Objection: "There is no general agreed upon and significant expression of desirable moral character in such a world. […] Our world lacks the sort of moral cohesiveness and value unity which traditional virtue theorists saw as prerequisites of a viable moral community" (VE, 215). Louden suggests that it is an advantage of rule-based ethics over virtue ethics that these universal rules are abstract enough to be able to apply to people who hold various different conceptions of "human purposes and moral ideals" (VE, 215). Leaving aside the Nietzschean objection that rule-based ethics such as Kantianism and utilitarianism may not be as open to pluralism as Louden

[157] Robert Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," originally published in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 21 (1984), 227-36, reprinted in Crisp and Slote, ed. *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford, 1998, 201-216.

suggests, it does seem that Aristotelian virtue ethics, with its singular conception of the natural telos of human life and 'the good life,' is ill-suited to our contemporary situation, which lacks the kind of cohesive evaluative unity Louden thinks Aristotle's ethics requires. Of course, many virtue ethicists see this prevalence of modern pluralism as pernicious, false, and to a great extent *the* central problem facing modern ethics. To a certain extent Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree (e.g., insofar as they would both reject the 'leveling' effect of a total relativism regarding values.) Yet I hope to have shown that the evaluative method based on the notion of internal collapse allows Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to address this pluralism while avoiding outright relativism. Unlike most forms of virtue ethics, they are able to do so without having to rely on any supposedly objective (but inevitably contentious) universal evaluative standard.

c) Firm and Fixed Character Objection: "Once we grant the possibility of such changes in moral character, the need for more 'character-free' way of assessing action becomes evident. Character is not a permanent fixture, but rather plastic" (VE:209). This objection seems aimed at Aristotle's insistence on the need for a "firm and fixed character." As we have seen, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both have a much more dynamic view of character than Aristotle. They both explore the kinds of changes by which a person comes to fail according to his own values and the kinds of changes by which a person adopts entirely new values. Their ethical project thereby allows for more flexibility in understanding the notion of character. Importantly, this does not mean that they abandon the importance of personal integrity and continuity over time; for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche only the aesthete or the decadent lacks such continuity. But I think the way Kierkegaard and Nietzsche describe fundamental changes in the agent's character and way of life could be quite beneficial at answering the kind of worry Louden expresses here.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's notion of a fundamental existential stance can also help to answer some important questions within virtue ethics. For example, I think the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche yields a new

look at the ancient question of the unity of the virtues. The idea that the various virtues are somehow unified can take many forms, but the structure of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project suggests what might be called an existential account of unity of the virtues, one that is weaker than the strong notion of unity found in Aristotle.[158] For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, an agent's virtues are unified in the sense that they are all manifestations and expressions of the same fundamental existential stance. For example, Nietzsche's sovereign individual may have the virtues of courage, honesty, forbearance, gratitude, and creativity. What unifies these character traits within the agent is that they are all the manifestation of the agent's fundamental stance of life-affirming, individual sovereignty. Depending on the situation, this fundamental stance manifests itself in different particular character traits. Likewise, consider some of the virtues we might ascribe to Kierkegaard's 'knight of faith': love, trust, gratitude, steadfastness, honesty, and courage. For Kierkegaard, these are different character traits but they are unified in that they are all manifestations of the same fundamental stance of faith. What faith will demand of the agent at any given time cannot be specified in advance, as the Abraham story shows. But faith can manifest itself in these various character traits depending on the situation.[159]

This conception of the unity of the virtues is helpful for addressing an important problem that arises when we try to bring the thinking of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to bear on virtue ethics. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, a virtue may appear in more than one way of life, at least by name. Consider, for example, the list of Aristotelian virtues Solomon ascribes to Nietzsche's ideal. In

[158] At one point in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that all the virtues are manifestations of the virtue of practical wisdom since practical wisdom is necessary and sufficient for any of the other virtues (1144b32-1145a2).

[159] This unity of character traits goes beyond the unity that may be presumed if we consider that the agent's different character traits are, after all, all traits of the same character. As I have just discussed, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have a more dynamic view of character than we traditionally find in virtue ethics. This notion of character provides what (following Anti-Climacus) we might call a 'negative unity' in the sense that what unifies the virtues is not itself some further cause or entity (*SUD*:43). In contrast, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche propose a 'positive unity' in which the virtues are unified around some central willed stance.

almost every case there is a virtue by this same name in the way of life Nietzsche rejects, the ascetic or slavish life of Christian/Platonic morality:

Nietzsche's Aristotelian Virtues		Ascetic/Slavish Virtues
courage		courage
generosity		generosity
temperance		temperance
honesty		honesty
honor/integrity		honor/integrity
justice		justice
pride (megalopsychos)	*VS.*	*humility*
courtesy		courtesy
friendship		friendship
wittiness (a sense of humor)		(deemed too insignificant?)

At first glance, the widespread concordance between these lists threatens to undermine the value of turning to Nietzsche for an account of the virtues. If a character trait appears as a virtue in both the way of life he praises and the way of life he despises, then what can we conclude about the value of this character trait? Fortunately this objection rests on a misunderstanding: it assumes that the character traits named in one list are the same as the character traits named in the other list. According to Nietzsche, this is not the case. In fact, the widespread concordance between these lists should not be surprising to Nietzsche scholars. Nietzsche suggests that the 'revaluation of values' by which ascetic values came into being involved cleverly retaining the same virtue-terms used in noble morality while nonetheless radically inverting the *meaning* of these terms. This is what it means to "invert the aristocratic value equation." Nietzsche is clear that what is named as 'good' in these two value-paradigms are quite different things: "it is *not* the same concept 'good'" (*GM* I:7, I:11). It is one of the goals of Nietzsche's genealogical project to uncover the original (noble) meanings of our value terms, which he believes are still discernable in their etymological roots. We might think of Nietzsche as pursuing Confucian or Socratic project of 'rectifying the names' in which the supposedly true meaning of value terms is restored. But it could be that he simply wants to show us the plurality of

meanings that value terms can have; accepting the plurality of different value-paradigms behind this plurality of meanings would already constitute a significant step toward rejecting the claims of universality made by traditional morality.

The issue of multiple-listed virtues shows why the ethical project I have been exploring should be pursued alongside the project in virtue ethics of identifying and explaining character traits as virtues and vices. For Nietzsche, the fact that the virtues of the ascetic life and the virtues of the noble life share the same name means that when speaking of a virtue it is crucial that we specify whether we mean the ascetic/slavish version of this virtue or the noble version of it (or, alternately, the sovereign version of it.) Thus, the project of explaining the different existential stances underlying these different virtues is necessary if we are to speak unambiguously about virtues in Nietzsche. Of course, it might be possible to address each virtue separately and in each case explain the difference between this virtue as a manifestation of a stance of life-denying *ressentment* and this virtue as a manifestation of a stance of sovereign or noble life-affirmation. But philosophically speaking, it seems more efficient to start out by explaining the fundamental differences between these ways of life, thereby eliminating the need to explain this difference again and again for each particular virtue. If we begin by drawing the distinction between the ascetic life and the sovereign life, for example, we can then more easily understand the difference between ascetic courage and sovereign courage, ascetic honesty and sovereign honesty, ascetic temperance and sovereign temperance, and so on.

For Nietzsche, character traits sharing the same name but appearing in different ways of life may be vastly different in nature. But it would go too far to say that these character traits share *only* a name; they may also share some general similarities such as the kinds of situations to which they are a response. For example, sovereign courage and ascetic courage may both be responses to situations of danger. The agent may respond to one and the same situation of danger with either sovereign self-certainty or ascetic self-denial and resignation,

depending on the agent's way of life. So it is not entirely misleading to call both of these character traits 'courage'. Nonetheless, the difference between sovereign virtue and its ascetic counterpart is a difference in kind, not a difference of degree. Sovereign courage is as radically different from ascetic courage as self-reverential self-certainty is radically different from resigned self-denial. Likewise, sovereign honesty and ascetic honesty are not just different versions or shades of the same thing: they are fundamentally different in kind.[160] In the same way, for Nietzsche ascetic integrity (a stern self-control accomplished by self-denigration and self-laceration) represents an affront to sovereign integrity, which is instead a joyous and instinctive sense of self-reverence and self-responsibility. But it is also true that this joyous, open, self-affirming kind of integrity is an affront to ascetic integrity, which would probably condemn it as fleeting vanity and self-delusion.

A similar pattern can be found in Kierkegaard's thinking. Some virtues, such a courage, steadfastness, conscientiousness, and honesty, may be found in the active ethical life, the life of resignation, and the life of faith.[161] But the nature of the character traits named by these terms will vary greatly between ways of life, even if they share some broad similarities. For example, steadfastness in any of these ways of life may be a character trait responsive to situations of external opposition, or exhaustion, or weakness within oneself. But how steadfastness as a manifestation of faith is responsive to such a situation is almost the opposite of how steadfastness as a manifestation of ethical self-reliance is responsive to this same situation. Ethical steadfastness entails resolutely relying only on one's self-enclosed sphere of self-reliant achievement; it is thus different in kind from the steadfastness of faith, which is a joyful, passionate openness to what lies beyond oneself. Among other things, the steadfastness of faith includes a

[160] As discussed in Chapter 4, Nietzsche thinks that the Platonic notion of 'truthfulness' as a transcendent value, and as aimed at eternal, unchanging, universal truths is in fact a *lie*; it is a violation of the sovereign value of truthfulness as having an intellectual conscience.

[161] For example, throughout *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de Silentio comments on the difference between his kind of courage (the courage of resignation) and "the courage of faith" (*FT*:63,77,99,100,101).

consistent resistance to the temptation to lapse into the stance of resignation or the stance of active self-reliance. Likewise, the openness of faith may seem to be a lack of steadfastness from the point of view of either version of the ethical way of life (e.g. Abraham's steadfastness seems like an ethical lapse from the point of view of the ethical life). So for Kierkegaard, as with Nietzsche, virtues sharing the same name in different ways of life may not only be vastly different in nature, they may also be mutually condemning.

In each of these cases, the actions the agent takes may be outwardly identical regardless of the agent's way of life, but the difference in the agent's fundamental existential stance makes all the difference for what kind of character trait is being manifested in this action. Thus, although two agents may act in identical ways, if their actions stem from different existential stances, their ethical situations may differ dramatically. One might say that the ethical *actuality* of the situation for the agent is established by the agent's way of life. The agent's fundamental existential stance manifests itself in various character traits which in turn manifest themselves in particular actions. What Kierkegaard and Nietzsche mean by a 'way of life' is the whole network of dialectical relationships by which a fundamental existential stance manifests itself in virtues and actions, as well as in beliefs, principles, goals, etc.

As this discussion implies, I read Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project as relativizing the virtues in a way that differs greatly from the typical projects of virtue ethics. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, not only does the nature of a supposed virtue change between ways of life, but the *value* of a given character trait cannot be assessed outside the domain of one or another way of life. For example, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche it can be said that in actual life there is no such thing as courage *per se*, and the value of a given form of courage (e.g. ascetic courage) will be assessed differently in different ways of life. In Nietzsche's thinking, ascetic courage (the character trait predisposing the agent to carry on in the face of fear or danger out of a stance of resigned self-denial) is a virtue in the ascetic life insofar as it is praised as an excellent character trait by

the values of this way of life. It may even be said that in an immediate sense ascetic courage is *good for the agent* living an ascetic life insofar as it promotes his highest goals and values (e.g. strengthening one's resolve by insulating one's self from what lies beyond it). But insofar as these goals and values represent internal collapse and nihilistic decline, ascetic courage cannot be said to be a virtue *per se* or in any objective sense. (Indeed, it is regarded as a vice from the perspective of the sovereign way of life.) Thus, Nietzsche would insist that the value of a given character trait is dependent upon the value of the fundamental existential stance of which it is a manifestation. This does not mean that Nietzsche's evaluation of character traits is merely subjective; as I hope to have shown, Nietzsche (like Kierkegaard) avoids relativism or subjectivism through the notion of internal collapse. Moreover, much of what is valuable in a given character trait may be preserved in the transformation to a new way of life, e.g. the inner strength of ascetic courage is preserved in sovereign courage even if the application and nature of this inner strength has changed fundamentally. So Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can make sense of the fact that we might find character traits within a collapsing way of life laudable even if they reject the notion of a non-perspectival evaluation of a character trait as a virtue or vice.

Like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard would consider the value of a given character trait to depend upon the value of the fundamental existential stance of which it is a manifestation. To return the example just mentioned, the steadfastness of the active ethical life may be a good thing for the agent living this life in the sense that it promotes and supports the goals and values of this way of life (e.g. achieving righteousness self-reliantly). But insofar as this goal itself constitutes a despairing misrelation to oneself, the various virtues which are a manifestation of this stance are also manifestations of despair. From the point of view of faith, the steadfastness in the ethical life is a sign of its demonic resistance to faith; the agent steadfastly clings to the despairing stance of self-reliance. Thus, Kierkegaard talks about the "splendid virtues" of the ethical life by which a

fundamentally despairing stance may manifest itself in character traits and actions that may seem to be meritorious:

> it is so easily forgotten that everything, speaking humanly, can be more or less as it should be in these respects, and yet the whole life be sin, that notorious kind of sin: the splendid vices, a willfulness which, either spiritlessly or shamelessly, remains, or wants to be, in ignorance of in how infinitely far deeper a sense a human self is under an obligation to obey God. (*SUD*: 114)

The ethical project I find in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche entails that the worth of the agent's character traits (a) depends upon the agent's way of life, and, like the worth of the agent's way of life, (b) cannot be determined by any objective, universal standard. Relativizing the virtues in this way may not be anathema to virtue ethics *per se*, but it is certainly incompatible with some central projects within virtue ethics. In particular, it seems to be incompatible with the project of grounding the evaluative worth of the virtues in an objective, universal notion of human flourishing. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have some basic notion of human flourishing, but they do not treat this notion of flourishing as any kind of objective *standard* by which to judge ways of life.[162] They thereby forego the advantage virtue ethics typically claims for itself in being able to justify the worth of the virtues on the objective grounds that that these virtues are good for the agent *qua* human being since they contribute to (or constitute) human flourishing.

This difference also reveals a difference between the way virtue ethics typically pursues the question of 'the good life' and the way Kierkegaard and Nietzsche pursue the question of 'the best way of life'. *Prima facie*, this might

[162] For example, Kierkegaard clearly regards relating to oneself through God as a form human flourishing; it is the way of living that is most compatible with the facts of what the self is and the potential for the self to attain excellence. But Kierkegaard's strategy is not to fault other ways of life for failing to match the higher standards of faith; rather, he explores how they collapse inwardly in the ways I have discussed. Likewise, Nietzsche clearly regards relating to oneself with the openness, honesty, reverence and loving affirmation of the sovereign individual as a form of human flourishing; it is also regarded as the way of living that is most compatible with the facts of what the self is and the potential for the self to attain excellence. Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche's strategy is not to fault other ways of life for not living up to the high standards of his creative, sovereign individual; rather, like Kierkegaard, he also explores how these ways of life collapse inwardly.

seem to be one of the closest points of comparison between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project and virtue ethics. It might even be objected that the ethical project I claim Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can (re)introduce to contemporary ethics is already part of contemporary ethics since it is already a part of virtue ethics. I think this objection can be answered if we consider the important differences in the way the evaluation of ways of life is pursued in these different projects. In virtue ethics, the question of 'the good life' usually assumes a singular, objective standard of goodness which establishes one way of life as *the* good life. Then the question of the good life centers on the question of how this objectively established moral merit relates to other aspects of the agent's life, in particular how it relates to the agent's happiness or sense of satisfaction.[163]

In contrast, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche consider a plurality of evaluative paradigms, each with its own conception of 'the good life'. The task of exploring the question of the best way of life involves examining each of these conceptions on its own terms and discerning the inner strengths or points of collapse within them. To some extent, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are interested in a sense of satisfaction gained by living the best life (e.g. in Kierkegaard's notion of the joy of being in the moment through faith, or in Nietzsche notion of the joy of feeling one's power and excellence.) But overall Kierkegaard and Nietzsche direct us away from supposing any neat connection between a sense of pleasurable happiness and satisfaction[164] and the kind of ethical merit they attribute to living the best life. Kierkegaard is clear that the life of faith involves inviting great suffering upon oneself. Likewise, Nietzsche is clear that great suffering is often a prompt for the kind of excellence he expects from this highest types; his joy is a joy amidst suffering (a "tragic" joy, in his terminology).

[163] Swanton nicely summarizes the views of other virtue ethicists on this question (Swanton, 56-60).
[164] As I discussed at length in the last chapter, the important notion of joy in the ideals of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche should not be confused with pleasure or a sense of immediate satisfaction.

To further understand this point of difference between virtue ethics and the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, consider Aristotle's treatment of the question of the best way of life. Aristotle does seem to consider different evaluative paradigms in that he considers the life of pleasure, the life of moral or social virtue (the military or political life), and the life of intellectual virtue (the contemplative life.) Each of these seems to have its own understanding of excellence in life and its own conception of *eudaimonia*. But Aristotle has an objective evaluative standard to arbitrate between these competing evaluative standards, namely the notion of a natural human telos and a universal standard of human *eudaimonia*. Moreover, consider that the virtues of the contemplative life do not conflict with the virtues of the active political or military life the way virtues in different ways of life conflict for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. For Aristotle, the person living the contemplative life needs to manifest the social virtues as well, and the person living the military and political life also needs to manifest the intellectual virtues. What distinguishes between different ways of life is not that different character traits are considered virtues or vices in each, bur rather what virtues are emphasized as central to the particular conception of success and flourishing that define this way of life. Success in the military or political life requires outstanding excellence in courage or ambition whereas success in the contemplative life requires outstanding excellence in wisdom (*sophia*). So the different paradigms of goodness are not radically different in the way they are for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Rather, for Aristotle there is a uniform set of character traits that are good for the agent *qua* human being; ways of life vary according to what character traits within this single, coherent list of virtues are emphasized as of central importance.[165]

[165] It may be, as some commentators have pointed out, that some virtues such as magnificence are not necessarily available to the person living the contemplative life, say for lack of means. The lack of this virtue may signal the failure of the active life but not the contemplative life. Nonetheless, I think we are far from the ethical pluralism assumed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in which competing paradigms of value have mutually contradictory versions of the virtues.

I think these differences between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project and virtue ethics are enough to dispel the objection that the contribution I think Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can make to contemporary ethics is unneeded since it is already a part of virtue ethics. But these differences are not so strong that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project and virtue ethics become mutually exclusive. Although there may be some points of strong disagreement, as I have shown, ultimately I think these ethical projects can be mutually beneficial to each other.

Robert Louden concludes his critique of virtue ethics by insisting that the field of ethics open itself to all available, valuable insights, in his case by pursuing *both* virtue ethics *and* action-centered ethics. From a certain philosophical standpoint it may seem advantageous and even obligatory to sacrifice this breadth of consideration for the greater consistency and economy that relying on only one approach to ethics may provide. But Louden is correct to say that this kind of philosophical economy is bought at too great a cost: "The theoretician's quest for conceptual economy and elegance has been won at too great a price, for the resulting reductionist definitions of moral concepts are not true to the facts of moral experience" (VA, 216). I would simply expand Louden's call for openness to include an openness to the ethical project found in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. I believe that ethics, understood both as a practice and as an academic discipline, has much more to gain in opening itself to a plurality of approaches – even at the cost of being unable to fully reconcile their differences – than it has to gain from remaining steadfastly committed to only one approach. My central thesis is that the ethical project pursued by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche should be included in our ethical thinking alongside the ethical projects we currently pursue.

§3 AVENUES FOR RESEARCH WITHIN THIS ETHICAL PROJECT

The last thing to discuss, briefly, is what kinds of further research and thinking are called for if we accept Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project

into the curriculum of ethical projects currently pursued. I do not want to leave the impression that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have somehow done all the work for us, and that we need only read their works in order to answer the questions their project asks. As discussed already, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche each have a number of ways of condemning, resisting and evading those among their readers who would be mere philosophical followers. The proper response to the ethical thinking of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is to open oneself to the questions they pursue, not to close these questions by insisting dogmatically on the answers Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have already offered. An exploration of the answers they give to these questions is valuable only as a means to our own pursuit of the question we learn from them. Moreover, their strong differences on some crucial matters make it impossible for a reader to slavishly adopt *both* of their philosophies regarding the best way of life. These differences demand a confrontation with the thinking of one or the other thinker, and preferably with both. I take it as a strength of the ethical project I am presenting that it does not argue dogmatically for a single response to the questions posed in this project. Instead, it critically explores the interesting dialogue that emerges between different responses to these questions.

Exploring this dialogue further might involve introducing new ways of life to be compared alongside the ways of life Kierkegaard and Nietzsche explore. Or it may involve introducing new ways of understanding the task of developing a typology and morphology of different ways of life. It might also involve further critical analysis of the way Kierkegaard and Nietzsche understand the notion of a way of life. Of particular interest, I think, is the way they conceive of some ways of life as somehow unified and directed by a fundamental guiding passion. Of course Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not claim that everyone has such a unifying element in their lives; in fact, they sometimes suggest that disintegration rather than unification is the norm. In either case, though, I think a lot more work could be done in explaining how this unity within a person might be possible, and how disunity and internal collapse

manifests itself in other aspects of the agent's life. Much more work could be done in explaining what I have called a "fundamental existential stance" and exploring how this stance manifests itself in particular actions, beliefs, goals and character traits.

Further research might also take a critical look at how Kierkegaard and Nietzsche describe and analyze various ways of life. It may be, for example, that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are both unfair to the life of pleasure. We might also question the assumption of guilt that plays such a big role in Kierkegaard's explanation of the despair of the ethical life, among other things. Likewise, we might also question whether Nietzsche is fair to Christianity and Platonism, either for lumping them together, or of accusing them of being born out of "the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred" (*GM* I:11). Alternately, it may be that Kierkegaard's depiction of the ethical life does not necessarily include all ways of life centered on duty, utility or personal excellence. Critical analysis might also explore the way Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ethical project attempts to avoid both relativism and a reliance on an objective, universal standard of evaluation. I think ethics could greatly benefit from a further exploration of the notion of internal collapse and the notion of ethical failure at this fundamental level, as a way of understanding particular misdeeds and vices holistically, in their relation to a personal, social, or historical context.

In order to broaden the philosophical context in which we can both understand and pursue the ethical project I am presenting, I think it would benefit us to explore how this project can be found in other thinkers. After all, I do not think Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are unique in pursuing this project, even if they have unique responses to it. The project I have describe is obviously strengthened by the addition of other voices. Aside from a few discussions of the ancient Greek predecessors of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, I have left aside the task of tracing the philosophical genealogy of the ethical project Kierkegaard and Nietzsche share. (Addressing the question of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's sources was obviously beyond the scope of this investigation.) But it would be

interesting to see to what extend we can find traces of this project in thinkers such as Hume, Kant and Hegel.

Likewise, I think it would be interesting to explore the legacy of this project in thinkers who came after Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In this respect the most obvious place to look may be in the thinking of 20th Century Existentialists. Although thinkers like Heidegger and Sartre are greatly influenced by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's pursuit of this project, I do not read them as pursuing this project directly. Camus does not pursue this project in his discursive work, although it is evident in his fiction.[166] Perhaps the clearest evidence of this project in the work of 20th Century Existentialists can be found in the writings of Martin Buber. Buber's description of the Hasidic life of faith can be read as a response to Kierkegaard's description of the Christian life of faith informed by Nietzsche's notion of a life-affirming spirituality. We can also find the legacy of this project in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein who, along with Buber and Camus, is one of the 20th Century's best readers of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.[167]

I think Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's pursuit of this ethical project could also have valuable contributions to make to particular issues in contemporary ethical debate. For example, there has been recent interest in the issue of individual autonomy.[168] Some thinkers, like Karl Ameriks, defend the traditional

[166] For example, consider the different responses to the plague that Camus illustrates in his novel *The Plague*. The difference between the stance taken to the plague by Dr. Rieux and Father Paneloux illustrate a divide between the fundamental stance of otherworldly resignation and the stance of humanistic resolve.
[167] Traces of their ethical project can be found in Wittgenstein's comments on the world 'waxing and waning as a whole' and the world of the 'happy man' being a different world from the world of the 'unhappy man' (Tractatus, 643). We know that Wittgenstein purchased an eight-volume set of Nietzsche's collected works in the fall of 1914, and that he was much impressed with Nietzsche's understanding of Christianity as a fundamental attitude rather than a set of beliefs. (Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 121-2). Of Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein declared "Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century" and is said to have learned Danish in order to read Kierkegaard in the original. For a lengthy discussion of this topic, see James Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors" in Tessin and von der Ruhr, eds. *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, (London: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 248-331.
[168] J.B. Schneewind gives an overview of this topic in his *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Kantian notion of autonomy.[169] Other thinkers, like Keith Lehrer and Marilyn Friedman, press for a reconsideration of this issue in the light of recent Cartesian thought in the case of Lehrer and feminist thought in the case of Friedman.[170] I hope to have shown, contrary to Brian Leiter's lengthy assessment of this issue, that Nietzsche has a robust notion of individual autonomy, even if it is one that differs greatly from the traditional Enlightenment notion of autonomy. What makes Nietzsche's notion of autonomy so valuable, I think, is the fact that he takes into account the physiological and psychological conditions that are required for autonomy and he rightly shows the tension between a robust notion of individual autonomy and any approach to ethics relying on universal rational principles. I also hope to have shown that Kierkegaard has an interesting and challenging critique of autonomy, both in the Kantian sense and in Nietzsche's sense as well.

Lastly, and perhaps most obviously, I think the ethical project of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche could be continued by developing new typologies of different ways of life with new formulations of what way of life is considered best. The most fitting response to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche would be to undertake the ethical project they undertake and to work alongside them in formulating an original response to this project. Even here, however, I would expect that anyone undertaking this project would have much to learn from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's response to this project. We can regard the work of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both as training in how to pursue this project and as helpfully setting out some of the key issues that any pursuit of this project would likely encounter.

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[169] Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[170] Keith Lehrer, *Self-Trust: A Study of Reason, Knowledge, and Autonomy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

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